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ESSAY OF DRAMATIC POESIE



DRYDEN

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ESSAY OF DRAMATIC POESIE

BY

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INTRODUCTION

THE *Essay of Dramatic Poesie*, "written in the country without the help of books or the advice of friends," was probably composed at Charlton, Wiltshire, during Dryden's long absence from London at the time of the great plague of 1665.* As a matter of literary history it is interesting to remember that this was the year in which, driven from the city by the same circumstances, Milton seized the opportunity furnished by enforced leisure of completing his *Paradise Lost*. The contrast presented by the themes upon which these two great writers meditated in their retirement is eminently suggestive.

John Dryden was born at Aldwinkle All Saints, Northamptonshire, on the 9th August 1631, and was educated at Westminster and at Trinity College, Cambridge. In 1654, the year in which he took his degree, his father died, leaving him a small property. He then drifted to London, where for a time he seems to have been employed in some secretarial capacity

* The *Essay* was not, however, published till 1668, and the reference towards the close to the "seven years" which had elapsed "since his Majesty's return," leads us to infer that it was actually finished, or at least revised, shortly before it was sent to press.

or clerkship. His first substantial experiment in literature—the *Heroic Stanzas on the Death of Oliver Cromwell*—appeared in 1659. In these bombastic verses, with all their crudities, affectations, and "metaphysical" conceits, not even the most prescient critic could have detected any indication of the splendid powers which Dryden's work was presently to reveal. With the return of the Stuarts the young poet found it convenient to change his politics, and his next publications, marked by a great advance in form and style, celebrated the restoration and the coronation of Charles II. In 1663 Dryden married Lady Elizabeth Howard, sister of his friend, Sir Robert § Howard, the Crites of the present Essay; but the union was not a fortunate one. By this time he was working his way steadily into notice as a playwright, though he gained no pronounced success till the production (in collaboration with Howard) of *The Indian Queen* in 1664 and its sequel, *The Indian Emperor*, in 1665. Then came the plague, the closing of the theatres, and the composition of the *Essay of Dramatic Poesy*, and the long poem *Annus Mirabilis*. The faults of this latter work are numerous and glaring; but it has vigour and distinction, and easily placed the writer in the front rank of English poets at a time when poetic genius was at a low ebb, and there were few indeed to contest his position.

With the reopening of the theatres Dryden returned with great energy to the dramatic field, and for a number of years continued to produce plays of varying merit and of very different styles. But though his dramatic works bulk large in his collected writings, they constitute, taken in the mass, the least vital and interesting portion of his total output. While, as the essay here reprinted shows, he devoted much attention to critical questions connected with the drama, and wrote of these with insight and sagacity, he lacked creative power. His tragedies, too, belonging for the most part to the so-called "heroic" class, had little of the truth of human nature to commend them when tastes changed; and he himself condemned his comedies to well-merited oblivion by his shameless indulgence in the foulness and indecency unfortunately so characteristic of the restoration stage.

In 1670 Dryden was made poet-laureate and historiographer-royal; and in 1681 opened a new and most important chapter in his career by the publication of the first of his great satires, *Absolom and Achitophel*. This was an outgrowth from the intense excitement caused by the supposed Popish Plot, and was immediately directed against the Earl of Shaftesbury, then intriguing to have the Duke of York excluded from succession to the crown in favour of the young Duke of Monmouth. The sensation produced by this

brilliant polemic was immense, and it is still considered, as Scott said, the finest political satire in the language. Master of a marvellously clear and forcible style, and with the power of making every detail tell, Dryden is here shown at his best, though the satires which followed—*The Medal* and *MacFlecknoe*—are scarcely less wonderful and effective. To this period also belong his two great theological poems, which are especially interesting as illustrating his controversial skill, his ability to make the most of any position he might at the time adopt, and his unrivalled facility as a reasoner in verse. The first of these—*Religio Laici*—is a defence of the doctrines of the Anglican Church, of which he was then a member; the second—*The Hind and the Panther*—an elaborate argument in favour of Roman Catholicism, to which, in the meantime, he had been converted. The question of the sincerity of his religious change, like that of the real significance of his political fluctuations, is an intricate one, and is too far away from our immediate purposes to be discussed here.* But it will be well for the student of Dryden's literary criticism to note that his mind was in a state of almost perpetual vacillation about every subject to which he gave attention, and that emphatic as was his ex-

* This whole matter is admirably treated by Scott, in his *Life of Dryden*, § 6.

pression of whatever opinions he chanced to hold at any given moment, his changes of judgment and sympathy were often rapid and fundamental.

He had once more trimmed his political sails to take advantage of the accession of James II. But the revolution of 1688 swept away all hopes he may have cherished of recognition and advancement. Deprived of all his offices, Dryden now accepted with manly dignity the troubles which darkened his declining years, and, turning with renewed industry to literature, maintained under the burden of increasing ill-health a wonderful activity to the end. He produced more plays, translated Juvenal, Persius, and Virgil, and in his *Fables* (paraphrases from the *Iliad*, Ovid, Boccaccio, and Chaucer) gave the world some of his finest work. These were published in November 1699. On the 1st May of the following year he died.

In all respects the most considerable figure in English literature during the second half of the seventeenth century, Dryden merits special attention as our first great prose writer and our first systematic critic. English prose before the restoration—the prose, for example, of Raleigh and Hooker—was stately, rich, and at times magnificent, but it was too cumbrous, intricate, and unwieldy for common use; and it was this prose which, in Dryden's earlier manhood, was still being written by such men as Milton, Clarendon, and

Taylor. It was a most important part of the business of the restoration period to perfect and give currency to an English style which, like the French style by which it was largely influenced, should be clear, simple, flexible, direct, and serviceable for the ordinary purposes of exposition and discussion; and Dryden beyond all other men is to be regarded as the leader in this much-needed work of reform. And as the restoration was the age of the new prose, so it was the age of the new criticism; for though a good deal of criticism had been produced before this, it was now for the first time that men came to be seriously concerned about principles in literature, and began to analyse methods, institute comparisons, and seek for definite standards. Here, again, the weight and power of Dryden's genius gave him an easy supremacy.

The most elaborate and, if we except the Preface to the *Fables*, the most interesting of all his critical compositions, is the present essay, which, supplemented by the Introductions to various plays, constitutes our first important contribution to the discussion of the drama as a form of literary art. It reveals to the full Dryden's extraordinary qualifications as a critic and a master of style, for the matter is characterised by breadth and sanity, acumen and common-sense, the manner by lucidity, vigour, and colloquial ease.

To read this essay profitably, we must place

ourselves at the point of view of the time when it was written. It must be remembered that, largely as a result of England's new political and social relations, a great enthusiasm for all things French had grown up in this country after the restoration; and the cultured classes, while they adopted many of the habits, manners, and ideals of their neighbours across the Channel, learned to regard their drama also with the utmost admiration. Now the French drama was marked by structural correctness, respect for decorum, and strict adherence in theory, at any rate, to the so-called classic unities of time, place, and action; and it was inevitable that the newly-bred interest in these things should bring about a widespread neglect of the free romantic English drama and lead even to an openly expressed contempt for the work of Shakespeare himself. At the same time, various questions connected with the practice of the French playwrights came naturally to the front—as to the value of the unities, for instance, and the use of rhyme in place of blank verse. Furthermore, throughout the current discussion of these, as of all similar matters, it was the habit of the age to turn back to Aristotle and Horace for rule and guidance, to consult the precedents furnished by antiquity, and to rely more or less implicitly upon the authority of classic writers. Hence there was another question which arose from

time to time, and which a little later was to fill the world of French letters with excitement and inspire Swift to the production of his famous satire, *The Battle of the Books*—the question of the respective merits of the ancients and the moderns, and of the right of the moderns to break away from classic rule, assert the freedom of genius, and work out the principles of a new literature on their own accounts.

All these matters, it will be seen, go to the making of the *Essay of Dramatic Poesy*, in which the chief subjects considered are the relative importance and value of the ancient and the modern dramas; the artistic claims both of the French drama (based in theory upon the ancient) as compared with the independent or "romantic" drama of the Elizabethans, and of this Elizabethan drama itself as compared with the drama of Dryden's own time; the true significance of the unities; and the advantages and disadvantages of rhyme as a medium of dramatic expression.

The discussion, it will be noted, is thrown into the form of a dialogue — a favourite device since the revival of learning, when all over Europe men had begun to imitate Plato and Cicero. The critical value of this form lies, of course, in the fact that it affords an opportunity for the consideration of any given subject from different points of view; and it doubtless commended itself to Dryden both for this reason

and because it fell in with the curious flexibility of his own judgment. "You see it is a dialogue," he afterwards explained, "sustained by persons of several opinions, all of them left doubtful, to be determined by readers in general."* Hence the employment of the controversial method may very probably have been suggested in the first instance by the writer's characteristically sceptical spirit. But however that may be, it is important to observe that as literary principles are thus treated, not as fixed and final, but as open to varying interpretations, the older critical didacticism is abandoned and the comparative line of investigation adopted. This fact adds much to the historic significance of the Essay.

There are four interlocutors—Crites, Eugenius, Lisideius, and Neander, representing respectively, it is generally admitted, Sir Robert Howard, Lord Buckhurst, Sir Charles Sedley, and Dryden himself. Crites asserts the superiority of the ancients to the moderns, in virtue of their closer imitation of nature, and upholds the doctrine of the unities. Eugenius defends the French drama against the classicists; maintains that with the ancient playwrights poetic justice was imperfectly realised; and points out the deficiency of the classic drama in one important respect—its neglect of Love as theme and motive. Lisideius in

* *Defence*, prefixed to second edition of *The Indian Emperor*.

turn undertakes the advocacy of the French drama against the English, on the ground of its adherence to the unities, great structural regularity, and use of rhyme. Neander protests against this: the English, he declares, excel in "lively imitation of nature," richness of invention, variety. He further insists that the French drama has lost more than it has gained by undue regard for decorum and obedience to rules, and argues that in English plays—even when most "irregular"—there is more "masculine fancy" and a "greater spirit in the writing" than is ever to be found on the French stage.

These are the main points discussed. The result, as we have seen Dryden acknowledge, is left in some uncertainty; for while superstitious veneration for classical antiquity and the current admiration for the French drama are boldly challenged, and while, too, the older English dramatists are defended, the ancients and the French are alike treated with the greatest respect; the value of rhyme (one of the salient characteristics of the French drama) is emphasised; and the unities are practically admitted as essential principles of a good play. On the conservative side, the argument is, that while dramatic rules may be derived immediately from the ancients, the ancients derived them direct from nature; so that to imitate the ancients and to follow nature turn out

to be one and the same thing. * On the other hand, a case is made out for the irregular English drama, and, therefore, for the right of the individual playwright to go straight to nature for himself. The general purpose of the Essay, however, may be said to be twofold:—to defend rhyme in the drama against Sir Robert Howard,† and "to vindicate the honour of our English writers, from the censure of those who unjustly prefer the French before them." ‡

Upon all the questions raised in this discussion, Dryden's mind afterwards underwent a variety of changes. § The work cannot, therefore, be regarded

* "If the rules be well considered, we shall find then to be made only to reduce nature into method," Dryden afterwards wrote in his Preface to *Troilus and Cressida*. Pope must have had these words in mind when he penned his well-known couplet in the *Essay on Criticism*:—

"Those rules, of old discovered not devised,
Are nature still, but nature methodised."

† *Defence of an Essay of Dramatic Poesie.*

‡ *To the Reader.*

§ When he presently abandoned rhyme (see Prologue to *Aureng-zebe*) he acknowledged that his former arguments for its use were unsatisfactory. He made light of the rules in his Preface to *All for Love*, and insisted upon their importance in his Preface to *Troilus and Cressida*. Even his feeling towards Shakespeare—nobly eulogised in the present Essay—was subject to extraordinary fluctuations. He gave him splendid praise in his memorable Prologue to the revised *Tempest*; attacked him for bad plots and writing "meanly" in his *Defence of the Epilogue to the Conquest of Granada*, Part II.; and was warm in his admiration of him in the Prologue to *Aureng-zebe* and the Preface to *All for Love*.

as a final and authoritative statement of his opinions upon the dramatic problems dealt with in it. But its personal and historic interest is none the less beyond dispute. "By far the most delightful reproduction of the classic dialogue ever written in English," as Mr Lowell says, the Essay makes capital reading for its own sake. It is full of good and suggestive matter even where its issues are no longer vital; while those issues themselves have great importance for the student of dramatic development. And it gives us an admirable opportunity of studying the method and style of the man whom Johnson justly called "the father of English criticism."

EPISTLE DEDICATORY

TO THE ESSAY OF

DRAMATIC POESY

TO THE RIGHT HONOURABLE

CHARLES, LORD BUCKHURST

My Lord,

As I was lately reviewing my loose papers, amongst the rest I found this Essay, the writing of which, in this rude and indigested manner wherein your lordship now sees it, served as an amusement to me in the country, when the violence of the last plague had driven me from the town. Seeing then our theatres shut up, I was engaged in these kind of thoughts with the same delight with which men think upon their absent mistresses. I confess I find many things in this Discourse which I do not now approve; my judgment being not a little altered since the writing of it; but whether for the better or the worse, I know not: neither indeed is it much material, in an essay, where all I have said is problematical. For the way of writing plays in verse, which I have seemed to favour, I have, since that

time, laid the practice of it aside, till I have more leisure, because I find it troublesome and slow. But I am no way altered from my opinion of it, at least with any reasons which have opposed it. For your lordship may easily observe, that none are very violent against it, but those who either have not attempted it, or who have succeeded ill in their attempt. It is enough for me to have your lordship's example for my excuse in that little which I have done in it; and I am sure my adversaries can bring no such arguments against verse, as those with which the fourth act of *Pompey* will furnish me in its defence. Yet, my lord, you must suffer me a little to complain of you, that you too soon withdraw from us a contentment, of which we expected the continuance, because you gave it us so early. It is a revolt, without occasion, from your party, where your merits had already raised you to the highest commands, and where you have not the excuse of other men, that you have been ill used, and therefore laid down arms. I know no other quarrel you can have to verse, than that which Spurina had to his beauty, when he tore and mangled the features of his face, only because they pleased too well the sight. It was an honour which seemed to wait for you, to lead out a new colony of writers from the mother nation: and upon the first spreading of your ensigns, there had been many in a readiness to have followed so fortunate a leader; if not all, yet the better part of poets:

——pars, indocili melior grege; mollis et exspes
Inominata perprimat cubilia.

I am almost of opinion, that we should force you to accept of the command, as sometimes the Praetorian bands have compelled their captains to receive the empire. The court, which is the best and surest judge of writing, has generally allowed of verse; and in the town it has found favourers of wit and quality. As for your own particular, my lord, you have yet youth and time enough to give part of them to the divertisement of the public, before you enter into the serious and more unpleasant business of the world. That which the French poet said of the temple of Love, may be as well applied to the temple of the Muses. The words, as near as I can remember them, were these:

Le jeune homme à mauvaise grace,
N'ayant pas adoré dans le Temple d'Amour;
Il faut qu'il entre; et pour le sage,
Si ce n'est pas son vrai séjour,
C'est un gîte sur son passage.

I leave the words to work their effect upon your lordship in their own language, because no other can so well express the nobleness of the thought; and wish you may be soon called to bear a part in the affairs of the nation, where I know the world expects you, and wonders why you have been so long forgotten; there being no person amongst our young nobility, on whom the eyes of all men are so much

bent. But in the mean time, your lordship may imitate the course of Nature, who gives us the flower before the fruit: that I may speak to you in the language of the muses, which I have taken from an excellent poem to the king:

> As Nature, when she fruit designs, thinks fit
> By beauteous blossoms to proceed to it;
> And while she does accomplish all the spring,
> Birds to her secret operations sing.

I confess I have no greater reason, in addressing this Essay to your lordship, than that it might awaken in you the desire of writing something, in whatever kind it be, which might be an honour to our age and country. And methinks it might have the same effect on you, which Homer tells us the fight of the Greeks and Trojans before the fleet, had on the spirit of Achilles; who, though he had resolved not to engage, yet found a martial warmth to steal upon him at the sight of blows, the sound of trumpets, and the cries of fighting men.

For my own part, if, in treating of this subject, I sometimes dissent from the opinion of better wits, I declare it is not so much to combat their opinions, as to defend my own, which were first made publick. Sometimes, like a scholar in a fencing-school, I put forth myself, and shew my own ill play, on purpose to be better taught. Sometimes I stand desperately to my arms, like the foot when deserted by their horse; not in hope to overcome, but only to yield on more

honourable terms. And yet, my lord, this war of opinions, you well know, has fallen out among the writers of all ages, and sometimes betwixt friends. Only it has been prosecuted by some, like pendants, with violence of words, and managed by others, like gentlemen, with candour and civility. Even Tully had a controversy with his dear Atticus; and in one of his Dialogues, makes him sustain the part of an enemy in philosophy, who, in his letters, is his confident of state, and made privy to the most weighty affairs of the Roman senate. And the same respect which was paid by Tully to Atticus, we find returned to him afterwards by Caesar on a like occasion, who, answering his book in praise of Cato, made it not so much his business to condemn Cato, as to praise Cicero.

But that I may decline some part of the encounter with my adversaries, whom I am neither willing to combat, nor well able to resist; I will give your lordship the relation of a dispute betwixt some of our wits on the same subject, in which they did not only speak of plays in verse, but mingled, in the freedom of discourse, some things of the ancient, many of the modern, ways of writing; comparing those with these, and the wits of our nation with those of others: it is true they differed in their opinions, as it is probable they would: neither do I take upon me to reconcile, but to relate them; and that as Tacitus professes of himself, *sine studio partium, aut ira*, without passion or interest; leaving your lordship to decide it in

favour of which part you shall judge most reasonable, and withal, to pardon the many errors of

Your Lordship's

Most obedient humble servant,

JOHN DRYDEN.

TO THE READER

THE drift of the ensuing discourse was chiefly to vindicate the honour of our English writers, from the censure of those who unjustly prefer the French before them. This I intimate, lest any should think me so exceedingly vain, as to teach others an art which they understand much better than myself. But if this incorrect Essay, written in the country without the help of books or advice of friends, shall find any acceptance in the world, I promise to myself a better success of the Second Part, wherein I shall more fully treat of the virtues and faults of the English poets, who have written either in this, the epick, or the lyrick way.

AN ESSAY

OF

DRAMATIC POESY

IT was that memorable day, in the first summer of the late war, when our navy engaged the Dutch; a day wherein the two most mighty and best appointed fleets which any age had ever seen, disputed the command of the greater half of the globe, the commerce of nations, and the riches of the universe: while these vast floating bodies, on either side, moved against each other in parallel lines, and our countrymen, under the happy conduct of his royal highness, went breaking, by little and little, into the line of the enemies; the noise of the cannon from both navies reached our ears about the city, so that all men being alarmed with it, and in a dreadful suspense of the event, which they knew was then deciding, every one went following the sound as his fancy led him; and leaving the town almost empty, some took towards the park, some cross the river, others down it; all seeking the noise in the depth of silence.

Among the rest, it was the fortune of Eugenius,

Crites, Lisideius, and Neander, to be in company together; three of them persons whom their wit and quality have made known to all the town; and whom I have chose to hide under these borrowed names, that they may not suffer by so ill a relation as I am going to make of their discourse.

2. Taking then a barge, which a servant of Lisideius had provided for them, they made haste to shoot the bridge, and left behind them that great fall of waters which hindered them from hearing what they desired: after which, having disengaged themselves from many vessels which rode at anchor in the Thames, and almost blocked up the passage towards Greenwich, they ordered the watermen to let fall their oars more gently; and then, every one favouring his own curiosity with a strict silence, it was not long ere they perceived the air to break about them like the noise of distant thunder, or of swallows in a chimney: those little undulations of sound, though almost vanishing before they reached them, yet still seeming to retain somewhat of their first horrour, which they had betwixt the fleets. After they had attentively listened till such time as the sound by little and little went from them, Eugenius, lifting up his head, and taking notice of it, was the first who congratulated to the rest that happy omen of our nation's victory: adding, that we had but this to desire in confirmation of it, that we might hear no more of that noise, which was now leaving the English coast. When the rest had concurred in the same opinion, Crites, a person of a sharp judg-

ment, and somewhat too delicate a taste in wit, which the world have mistaken in him for ill-nature, said, smiling to us, that if the concernment of this battle had not been so exceeding great, he could scarce have wished the victory at the price he knew he must pay for it, in being subject to the reading and hearing of so many ill verses as he was sure would be made on that subject. Adding, that no argument could scape some of those eternal rhymers, who watch a battle with more diligence than the ravens and birds of prey; and the worst of them surest to be first in upon the quarry: while the better able, either out of modesty writ not at all, or set that due value upon their poems, as to let them be often desired and long expected. "There are some of those impertinent people of whom you speak," answered Lisideius, "who to my knowledge are already so provided, either way, that they can produce not only a panegyrick upon the victory, but, if need be, a funeral elegy on the duke; wherein, after they have crowned his valour with many laurels, they will at last deplore the odds under which he fell, concluding that his courage deserved a better destiny." All the company smiled at the conceipt of Lisideius; but Crites, more eager than before, began to make particular exceptions against some writers, and said, the publick magistrate ought to send betimes to forbid them; and that it concerned the peace and quiet of all honest people, that ill poets should be as well silenced as seditious preachers. "In my opinion,"

replied Eugenius, "you pursue your point too far; for as to my own particular, I am so great a lover of poesy, that I could wish them all rewarded, who attempt but to do well; at least, I would not have them worse used than one of their brethren was by Sylla the Dictator:—*Quem in concione vidimus* (says Tully,) *cum ei libellum malus poeta de populo subjecisset, quod epigramma in eum fecisset tantummodo alternis versibus longiusculis, statim ex iis rebus quas tunc vendebat jubere ei praemium tribui, sub ea conditione ne quid postea scriberet.*" "I could wish with all my heart," replied Crites, "that many whom we know were as bountifully thanked upon the same condition,—that they would never trouble us again. For amongst others, I have a mortal apprehension of two poets, whom this victory, with the help of both her wings, will never be able to escape." "'Tis easy to guess whom you intend," said Lisideius; "and without naming them, I ask you, if one of them does not perpetually pay us with clenches upon words, and a certain clownish kind of railery? if now and then he does not offer at a catachresis or Clevelandism, wresting and torturing a word into another meaning: in fine, if he be not one of those whom the French would call *un mauvais buffon*; one who is so much a well-willer to the satire, that he intends at least to spare no man; and though he cannot strike a blow to hurt any, yet he ought to be punished for the malice of the action, as our witches are justly hanged, because

they think themselves to be such; and suffer deservedly for believing they did mischief, because they meant it." "You have described him," said Crites, "so exactly, that I am afraid to come after you with my other extremity of poetry. He is one of those who, having had some advantage of education and converse, knows better than the other what a poet should be, but puts it into practice more unluckily than any man; his style and matter are every where alike: he is the most calm, peaceable writer you ever read: he never disquiets your passions with the least concernment, but still leaves you in as even a temper as he found you; he is a very leveller in poetry: he creeps along with ten little words in every line, and helps out his numbers with *For to*, and *Unto*, and all the pretty expletives he can find, till he drags them to the end of another line; while the sense is left tired half way behind it: he doubly starves all his verses, first for want of thought, and then of expression; his poetry neither has wit in it, nor seems to have it; like him in Martial:

Pauper videri Cinna *vult, et est pauper.*

"He affects plainness, to cover his want of imagination: when he writes the serious way, the highest flight of his fancy is some miserable antithesis, or seeming contradiction; and in the comic he is still reaching at some thin conceit, the ghost of a jest, and that too flies before him, never to be caught; these

swallows which we see before us on the Thames are the just resemblance of his wit: you may observe how near the water they stoop, how many proffers they make to dip, and yet how seldom they touch it; and when they do, it is but the surface: they skim over it but to catch a gnat, and then mount into the air and leave it."

3. "Well, gentlemen," said Eugenius, "you may speak your pleasure of these authors; but though I and some few more about the town may give you a peaceable hearing, yet assure yourselves, there are multitudes who would think you malicious and them injured: especially him whom you first described; he is the very Withers of the city: they have bought more editions of his works than would serve to lay under all their pies at the lord mayor's Christmas. When his famous poem first came out in the year 1660, I have seen them reading it in the midst of 'Change time; nay so vehement they were at it, that they lost their bargain by the candles' ends; but what will you say, if he has been received amongst great persons? I can assure you he is, this day, the envy of one who is lord in the art of quibbling; and who does not take it well, that any man should intrude so far into his province." "All I would wish," replied Crites, "is, that they who love his writings, may still admire him, and his fellow poet: *Qui Bavium non odit, &c.*, is curse sufficient." "And farther," added Lisideius, "I believe there is no man who writes well, but would think he

had hard measure, if their admirers should praise anything of his: *Nam quos contemnimus, eorum quoque laudes contemnimus.*" "There are so few who write well in this age," says Crites, "that methinks any praises should be welcome; they neither rise to the dignity of the last age, nor to any of the ancients: and we may cry out of the writers of this time, with more reason than Petronius of his, *Pace vestra liceat dixisse, primi omnium eloquentium perdidistis*: you have debauched the true old poetry so far, that Nature, which is the soul of it, is not in any of your writings."

4. "If your quarrel," said Eugenius, "to those who now write, be grounded only on your reverence to antiquity, there is no man more ready to adore those great Greeks and Romans than I am: but on the other side, I cannot think so contemptibly of the age in which I live, or so dishonourably of my own country, as not to judge we equal the ancients in most kinds of poesy, and in some surpass them; neither know I any reason why I may not be as zealous for the reputation of our age, as we find the ancients themselves were in reference to those who lived before them. For you hear your Horace saying,

Indignor quidquam reprehendi, non quia crassé
Compositum, illepidève putetur, sed quia nuper.

And after:

Si meliora dies, ut vina, poemata reddit,
Scire velim, pretim chartis quotus arroget annus?

"But I see I am engaging in a wide dispute, where the arguments are not like to reach close on either side; for poesy is of so large an extent, and so many both of the ancients and moderns have done well in all kinds of it, that in citing one against the other, we shall take up more time this evening than each man's occasions will allow him: therefore I would ask Crites to what part of poesy he would confine his arguments, and whether he would defend the general cause of the ancients against the moderns, or oppose any age of the moderns against this of ours?"

5. Crites, a little while considering upon this demand, told Eugenius, that if he pleased, he would limit their dispute to Dramatique Poesie; in which he thought it not difficult to prove, either that the ancients were superior to the moderns, or the last age of this of ours.

Eugenius was somewhat surprised, when he heard Crites make choice of that subject. "For ought I see," said he, "I have undertaken a harder province than I imagined; for though I never judged the plays of the Greek or Roman poets comparable to ours, yet, on the other side, those we now see acted come short of many which were written in the last age: but my comfort is, if we are overcome, it will be only by our own countrymen: and if we yield to them in this one part of poesy, we more surpass them in all the other: for in the epic or lyric way, it will be hard for them to shew us one such amongst

them, as we have many now living, or who lately were: they can produce nothing so courtly writ, or which expresses so much the conversation of a gentleman, as Sir John Suckling; nothing so even, sweet, and flowing, as Mr Waller; nothing so majestic, so correct, as Sir John Denham; nothing so elevated, so copious, and full of spirit, as Mr Cowley; as for the Italian, French, and Spanish plays, I can make it evident, that those who now write surpass them; and that the drama is wholly ours."

All of them were thus far of Eugenius his opinion, that the sweetness of English verse was never understood or practised by our fathers; even Crites himself did not much oppose it; and every one was willing to acknowledge how much our poesy is improved by the happiness of some writers yet living; who first taught us to mould our thoughts into easy and significant words,—to retrench the superfluities of expression,—and to make our rime so properly a part of the verse, that it should never mislead the sense, but itself be led and governed by it.

6. Eugenius was going to continue this discourse, when Lisideius told him that it was necessary, before they proceeded further, to take a standing measure of their controversy; for how was it possible to be decided who writ the best plays, before we know what a play should be? But, this once agreed on by both parties, each might have recourse to it, either to prove his own advantages, or to discover the failings of his adversary.

He had no sooner said this, but all desired the favour of him to give the definition of a play; and they were the more importunate, because neither Aristotle, nor Horace, nor any other, who had writ of that subject, had ever done it.

Lisideius, after some modest denials, at last confessed he had a rude notion of it; indeed, rather a description than a definition; but which served to guide him in his private thoughts, when he was to make a judgment of what others writ: that he conceived a play ought to be, *A just and lively image of human nature, representing its passions and humours, and the changes of fortune to which it is subject, for the delight and instruction of mankind.*

This definition, though Crites raised a logical objection against it—that it was only *genere et fine*, and so not altogether perfect, was yet well received by the rest; and after they had given order to the watermen to turn their barge, and row softly, that they might take the cool of the evening in their return, Crites, being desired by the company to begin, spoke on behalf of the ancients, in this manner:—

"If confidence presage a victory, Eugenius, in his own opinion, has already triumphed over the ancients: nothing seems more easy to him, than to overcome those whom it is our greatest praise to have imitated well; for we do not only build upon their foundations, but by their models. Dramatic Poesy had time enough, reckoning from Thespis (who first invented it) to Aristophanes, to be born, to grow up, and to

flourish in maturity. It has been observed of arts and sciences, that in one and the same century they have arrived to great perfection; and no wonder, since every age has a kind of universal genius, which inclines those that live in it to some particular studies: the work then, being pushed on by many hands, must of necessity go forward.

"Is it not evident, in these last hundred years, when the study of philosophy has been the business of all the Virtuosi in Christendom, that almost a new nature has been revealed to us? That more errors of the school have been detected, more useful experiments in philosophy have been made, more noble secrets in optics, medicine, anatomy, astronomy, discovered, than in all those credulous and doting ages from Aristotle to us?—so true it is, that nothing spreads more fast than science, when rightly and generally cultivated.

"Add to this, the more than common emulation that was in those times of writing well; which though it be found in all ages and all persons that pretend to the same reputation, yet poesy, being then in more esteem than now it is, had greater honours decreed to the professors of it, and consequently the rivalship was more high between them; they had judges ordained to decide their merit, and prizes to reward it; and historians have been diligent to record of Eschylus, Euripides, Sophocles, Lycophron, and the rest of them, both who they were that vanquished in these wars of the theatre,

and how often they were crowned: while the Asian kings and Grecian commonwealths scarce afforded them a nobler subject than the unmanly luxuries of a debauched court, or giddy intrigues of a factious city: —*Alit æmulatio ingenia*, (says Paterculus,) *et nunc invidia, nunc admiratio incitatio nem accendit:* Emulation is the spur of wit; and sometimes envy, sometimes admiration, quickens our endeavours.

"But now, since the rewards of honour are taken away, that virtuous emulation is turned into direct malice; yet so slothful, that it contents itself to condemn and cry down others, without attempting to do better: it is a reputation too unprofitable, to take the necessary pains for it; yet, wishing they had it, that desire is incitement enough to hinder others from it. And this, in short, Eugenius, is the reason why you have now so few good poets, and so many severe judges. Certainly, to imitate the ancients well, much labour and long study is required; which pains, I have already shewn, our poets would want encouragement to take, if yet they had ability to go through the work. Those ancients have been faithful imitators and wise observers of that nature which is so torn and ill represented in our plays; they have handed down to us a perfect resemblance of her; which we, like ill copiers, neglecting to look on, have rendered monstrous, and disfigured. But, that you may know how much you are indebted to those your masters, and be ashamed to have so ill requited them, I must remember you, that all the rules by which we

practise the drama at this day, (either such as relate to the justness and symmetry of the plot, or the episodical ornaments, such as descriptions, narrations, and other beauties, which are not essential to the play,) were delivered to us from the observations which Aristotle made, of those poets, who either lived before him, or were his contemporaries: we have added nothing of our own, except we have the confidence to say our wit is better; of which, none boast in this our age, but such as understand not theirs. Of that book which Aristotle has left us, περὶ τῆς Ποιητικῆς, Horace his Art of Poetry is an excellent comment, and, I believe, restores to us that Second Book of his concerning Comedy, which is wanting in him.

"Out of these two have been extracted the famous Rules, which the French call *Des Trois Unités*, or, The Three Unities, which ought to be observed in every regular play; namely, of Time, Place, and Action. "The unity of time they comprehend in twenty-four hours, the compass of a natural day, or as near as it can be contrived; and the reason of it is obvious to every one,—that the time of the feigned action, or fable of the play, should be proportioned as near as can be to the duration of that time in which it is represented: since therefore, all plays are acted on the theatre in the space of time much within the compass of twenty-four hours, that play is to be thought the nearest imitation of nature, whose plot or action is confined within that time; and, by the

same rule which concludes this general proportion of time, it follows, that all the parts of it are (as near as may be) to be equally subdivided; namely, that one act take not up the supposed time of half a day, which is out of proportion to the rest; since the other four are then to be straitened within the compass of the remaining half: for it is unnatural that one act, which being spoke or written is not longer than the rest, should be supposed longer by the audience; it is therefore the poet's duty, to take care that no act should be imagined to exceed the time in which it is represented on the stage; and that the intervals and inequalities of time be supposed to fall out between the acts.

"This rule of time, how well it has been observed by the ancients, most of their plays will witness; you see them in their tragedies, (wherein to follow this rule, is certainly most difficult,) from the very beginning of their plays, falling close into that part of the story which they intend for the action or principal object of it, leaving the former part to be delivered by narration: so that they set the audience, as it were, at the post where the race is to be concluded; and, saving them the tedious expectation of seeing the poet set out and ride the beginning of the course, they suffer you not to behold him, till he is in sight of the goal, and just upon you.

"For the second unity, which is that of Place, the ancients meant by it, that the scene ought to be continued through the play, in the same place where it

was laid in the beginning: for, the stage on which it is represented being but one and the same place, it is unnatural to conceive it many,—and those far distant from one another. I will not deny but, by the variation of painted scenes, the fancy, which in these cases will contribute to its own deceit, may sometimes imagine it several places, with some appearance of probability; yet it still carries the greater likelihood of truth, if those places be supposed so near each other, as in the same town or city; which may all be comprehended under the larger denomination of one place; for a greater distance will bear no proportion to the shortness of time which is allotted, in the acting, to pass from one of them to another; for the observation of this, next to the ancients, the French are to be most commended. They tie themselves so strictly to the unity of place, that you never see in any of their plays, a scene changed in the middle of an act: if the act begins in a garden, a street, or chamber, 'tis ended in the same place; and that you may know it to be the same, the stage is so supplied with persons, that it is never empty all the time: he who enters second, has business with him who was on before; and before the second quits the stage, a third appears who has business with him. This Corneille calls *la liaison des scènes*, the continuity or joining of the scenes; and 'tis a good mark of a well-contrived play, when all the persons are known to each other, and every one of them has some affairs with all the rest.

"As for the third unity, which is that of Action, the ancients meant no other by it than what the logicians do by their *finis*, the end or scope of any action; that which is the first in intention, and last in execution: now the poet is to aim at one great and complete action, to the carrying on of which all things in his play, even the very obstacles, are to be subservient; and the reason of this is as evident as any of the former. For two actions, equally laboured and driven on by the writer, would destroy the unity of the poem; it would be no longer one play, but two: not but that there may be many actions in a play, as Ben Johnson has observed in his *Discoveries*; but they must be all subservient to the great one, which our language happily expresses in the name of *under-plots*: such as in Terence's *Eunuch* is the difference and reconcilement of Thais and Phædria, which is not the chief business of the play, but promotes the marriage of Chærea and Chremes's sister, principally intended by the poet. There ought to be but one action, says Corneille, that is, one complete action, which leaves the mind of the audience in a full repose; but this cannot be brought to pass but by many other imperfect actions, which conduce to it, and hold the audience in a delightful suspence of what will be.

"If by these rules (to omit many other drawn from the precepts and practice of the ancients) we should judge our modern plays, 'tis probable that few of them would endure the trial: that which should be the business of a day, takes up in some of them an age;

instead of one action, they are the epitomes of a man's life; and for one spot of ground, which the stage should represent, we are sometimes in more countries than the map can show us.

"But if we allow the Ancients to have contrived well, we must acknowledge them to have written better. Questionless we are deprived of a great stock of wit in the loss of Menander among the Greek poets, and of Cæcilius, Afranius, and Varius, among the Romans; we may guess at Menander's excellency by the plays of Terence, who translated some of his; and yet wanted so much of him, that he was called by C. Cæsar the half-Menander; and may judge of Varius, by the testimonies of Horace, Martial, and Velleius Paterculus. 'Tis probable that these, could they be recovered, would decide the controversy; but so long as Aristophanes and Plautus are extant, while the tragedies of Euripides, Sophocles, and Seneca, are in our hands, I can never see one of those plays which are now written, but it increases my admiration of the ancients. And yet I must acknowledge further, that to admire them as we ought, we should understand them better than we do. Doubtless many things appear flat to us, the wit of which depended on some custom or story, which never came to our knowledge; or perhaps on some criticism in their language, which being so long dead, and only remaining in their books, 'tis not possible they should make us understand perfectly. To read Macrobius, explaining the propriety and elegancy of many words

in Virgil, which I had before passed over without consideration as common things, is enough to assure me that I ought to think the same of Terence; and that in the purity of his style (which Tully so much valued that he ever carried his works about him) there is yet left in him great room for admiration, if I knew but where to place it. In the mean time I must desire you to take notice, that the greatest man of the last age, Ben Johnson, was willing to give place to them in all things: he was not only a professed imitator of Horace, but a learned plagiary of all the others; you track him everywhere in their snow: if Horace, Lucan, Petronius Arbiter, Seneca, and Juvenal, had their own from him, there are few serious thoughts which are new in him: you will pardon me, therefore, if I presume he loved their fashion, when he wore their cloaths. But since I have otherwise a great veneration for him, and you, Eugenius, prefer him above all other poets, I will use no farther argument to you than his example: I will produce before you Father Ben, dressed in all the ornaments and colours of the ancients; you will need no other guide to our party, if you follow him; and whether you consider the bad plays of our age, or regard the good plays of the last, both the best and worst of the modern poets will equally instruct you to admire the ancients."

Crites had no sooner left speaking, but Eugenius, who had waited with some impatience for it, thus began:

"I have observed in your speech, that the former

part of it is convincing as to what the moderns have profited by the rules of the ancients; but in the latter you are careful to conceal how much they have excelled them; we own all the helps we have from them, and want neither veneration nor gratitude, while we acknowledge that, to overcome them, we must make use of the advantages we have received from them: but to these assistances we have joined our own industry; for, had we sat down with a dull imitation of them, we might then have lost somewhat of the old perfection, but never acquired any that was new. We draw not therefore after their lines, but those of nature; and having the life before us, besides the experience of all they knew, it is no wonder if we hit some airs and features which they have missed. I deny not what you urge of arts and sciences, that they have flourished in some ages more than others; but your instance in philosophy makes for me: for if natural causes be more known now than in the time of Aristotle, because more studied, it follows that poesy and other arts may, with the same pains, arrive still nearer to perfection; and, that granted, it will rest for you to prove that they wrought more perfect images of human life than we; which seeing in your discourse you have avoided to make good, it shall now be my task to shew you some part of their defects, and some few excellencies of the moderns. And I think there is none among us can imagine I do it enviously, or with purpose to detract from them; for what interest of fame or profit can the

living lose by the reputation of the dead? On the other side, it is a great truth which Velleius Paterculus affirms: *Audita visis libentius laudamus; et præsentia invidia præterita admiratione prosequimur; et his nos obrui, illis instrui credimus:* that praise or censure is certainly the most sincere, which unbribed posterity shall give us.

"Be pleased then in the first place to take notice, that the Greek poesy, which Crites has affirmed to have arrived to perfection in the reign of the old comedy, was so far from it, that the distinction of it into acts was not known to them; or if it were, it is yet so darkly delivered to us that we cannot make it out.

"All we know of it is, from the singing of their Chorus; and that too is so uncertain, that in some of their plays we have reason to conjecture they sung more than five times. Aristotle indeed divides the integral parts of a play into four. First, the *Protasis*, or entrance, which gives light only to the characters of the persons, and proceeds very little into any part of the action. Secondly, the *Epitasis*, or working up of the plot; where the play grows warmer, the design or action of it is drawing on, and you see something promising that it will come to pass. Thirdly, the *Catastasis*, called by the Romans, *Status*, the height and full growth of the play: we may call it properly the counter-turn, which destroys that expectation, imbroils the action in new difficulties, and leaves you far distant from that hope in which it found you; as

you may have observed in a violent stream resisted by a narrow passage,—it runs round to an eddy, and carries back the waters with more swiftness than it brought them on. Lastly, the *Catastrophe*, which the Grecians called λύσις, the French *le dénouement*, and we the discovery, or unravelling of the plot: there you see all things settling again upon their first foundations; and, the obstacles which hindered the design or action of the play once removed, it ends with that resemblance of truth and nature, that the audience are satisfied with the conduct of it. Thus this great man delivered to us the image of a play; and I must confess it is so lively, that from thence much light has been derived to the forming it more perfectly into acts and scenes: but what poet first limited to five the number of the acts, I know not; only we see it so firmly established in the time of Horace, that he gives it for a rule in comedy,—*Neu brevior quinto, neu sit productior actu.* So that you see the Grecians cannot be said to have consummated this art; writing rather by entrances, than by acts, and having rather a general indigested notion of a play, than knowing how and where to bestow the particular graces of it.

"But since the Spaniards at this day allow but three acts, which they call *Jornadas*, to a play, and the Italians in many of theirs follow them, when I condemn the ancients, I declare it is not altogether because they have not five acts to every play, but because they have not confined themselves to one certain number: it is building an house without a

model; and when they succeeded in such undertakings, they ought to have sacrificed to Fortune, not to the Muses.

"Next, for the plot, which Aristotle called τό μυθος, and often τῶν πραγμάτων σύνθεσις, and from him the Romans *Fabula*; it has already been judiciously observed by a late writer, that in their tragedies it was only some tale derived from Thebes or Troy, or at least something that happened in those two ages; which was worn so threadbare by the pens of all the epic poets, and even by tradition itself of the talkative Greeklings, (as Ben Johnson calls them,) that before it came upon the stage, it was already known to all the audience: and the people, so soon as ever they heard the name of Oedipus, knew as well as the poet, that he had killed his father by a mistake, and committed incest with his mother, before the play; that they were now to hear of a great plague, an oracle, and the ghost of Laius: so that they sat with a yawning kind of expectation, till he was to come with his eyes pulled out, and speak a hundred or more verses in a tragic tone, in complaint of his misfortunes. But one Oedipus, Hercules, or Medea, had been tolerable: poor people, they escaped not so good cheap; they had still the *chapon bouillé* set before them, till their appetites were cloyed with the same dish, and, the novelty being gone, the pleasure vanished; so that one main end of Dramatic Poesy in its definition, which was to cause delight, was of consequence destroyed.

"In their comedies, the Romans generally borrowed their plots from the Greek poets; and theirs was commonly a little girl stolen or wandered from her parents, brought back unknown to the city, there [falling into the hands of] some young fellow, who, by the help of his servant, cheats his father; and when her time comes, to cry,—*Juno Lucina, fer opem*, —one or other sees a little box or cabinet which was carried away with her, and so discovers her to her friends, if some god do not prevent it, by coming down in a machine, and taking the thanks of it to himself.

"By the plot you may guess much of the characters of the persons. An old father, who would willingly, before he dies, see his son well married; his debauched son, kind in his nature to his mistress, but miserably in want of money; a servant or slave, who has so much wit to strike in with him, and help to dupe his father; a braggadocio captain, a parasite, and a lady of pleasure.

"As for the poor honest maid, on whom the story is built, and who ought to be one of the principal actors in the play, she is commonly a mute in it: she has the breeding of the old Elizabeth way, which was for maids to be seen and not to be heard; and it is enough you know she is willing to be married, when the fifth act requires it.

"These are plots built after the Italian mode of houses,—you see through them all at once: the characters are indeed the imitation of nature, but

so narrow, as if they had imitated only an eye or an hand, and did not dare to venture on the lines of a face, or the proportion of a body.

"But in how strait a compass soever they have bounded their plots and characters, we will pass it by, if they have regularly pursued them, and perfectly observed those three unities of time, place, and action; the knowledge of which you say is derived to us from them. But in the first place give me leave to tell you, that the unity of place, however it might be practised by them, was never any of their rules: we neither find it in Aristotle, Horace, or any who have written of it, till in our age the French poets first made it a precept of the stage. The unity of time, even Terence himself, who was the best and most regular of them, has neglected: his *Heauton-timorumenos*, or Self-Punisher, takes up visibly two days, says Scaliger; the two first acts concluding the first day, the three last the day ensuing; and Euripides, in tying himself to one day, has committed an absurdity never to be forgiven him; for in one of his tragedies he has made Theseus go from Athens to Thebes, which was about forty English miles, under the walls of it to give battle, and appear victorious in the next act; and yet, from the time of his departure to the return of the Nuntius, who gives the relation of his victory, Æthra and the Chorus have but thirty-six verses; which is not for every mile a verse.

"The like error is as evident in Terence his *Eunuch*,

when Laches, the old man, enters by mistake into the house of Thais; where, betwixt his exit and the entrance of Pythias, who comes to give ample relation of the disorders he has raised within, Parmeno, who was left upon the stage, has not above five lines to speak. *C'est bien employer un temps si court*, says the French poet, who furnished me with one of the observations: and almost all their tragedies will afford us examples of the like nature.

"It is true, they have kept the continuity, or, as you called it *liaison des scènes*, somewhat better: two do not perpetually come in together, talk, and go out together; and other two succeed them, and do the same throughout the act, which the English call by the name of single scenes; but the reason is, because they have seldom above two or three scenes, properly so called, in every act; for it is to be accounted a new scene, not only every time the stage is empty; but every person who enters, though to others, makes it so; because he introduces a new business. Now the plots of their plays being narrow, and the persons few, one of their acts was written in a less compass than one of our well-wrought scenes; and yet they are often deficient even in this. To go no further than Terence; you find in the *Eunuch*, Antipho entering single in the midst of the third act, after Chremes and Pythias were gone off; in the same play you have likewise Dorias beginning the fourth act alone; and after she had made a relation of what was done at the Soldier's entertainment, (which by

the way was very inartificial, because she was presumed to speak directly to the audience, and to acquaint them with what was necessary to be known, but yet should have been so contrived by the poet as to have been told by persons of the drama to one another, and so by them to have come to the knowledge of the people,) she quits the stage, and Phædria enters next, alone likewise: he also gives you an account of himself, and of his returning from the country, in monologue; to which unnatural way of narration Terence is subject in all his plays. In his *Adelphi*, or Brothers, Syrus and Demea enter after the scene was broken by the departure of Sostrata, Geta, and Canthara; and indeed you can scarce look into any of his comedies, where you will not presently discover the same interruption.

"But as they have failed both in laying of their plots, and in the management, swerving from the rules of their own art by misrepresenting nature to us, in which they have ill satisfied one intention of a play, which was delight; so in the instructive part they have erred worse: instead of punishing vice and rewarding virtue, they have often shewn a prosperous wickedness, and an unhappy piety: they have set before us a bloody image of revenge in Medea, and given her dragons to convey her safe from punishment; a Priam and Astyanax murdered, and Cassandra ravished, and the lust and murder ending in the victory of him who acted them: in short, there is no indecorum in any of our modern plays, which

if I would excuse, I could not shadow with some authority from the ancients.

"And one farther note of them let me leave you: tragedies and comedies were not writ then as they are now, promiscuously, by the same person; but he who found his genius bending to the one, never attempted the other way. This is so plain, that I need not instance to you, that Aristophanes, Plautus, Terence, never any of them writ a tragedy; Æschylus, Euripides, Sophocles, and Seneca, never meddled with comedy: the sock and buskin were not worn by the same poet. Having then so much care to excel in one kind, very little is to be pardoned them, if they miscarried in it; and this would lead me to the consideration of their wit, had not Crites given me sufficient warning not to be too bold in my judgment of it; because, the languages being dead, and many of the customs and little accidents on which it depended lost to us, we are not competent judges of it. But though I grant that here and there we may miss the application of a proverb or a custom, yet a thing well said will be wit in all languages; and though it may lose something in the translation, yet to him who reads it in the original, 'tis still the same: he has an idea of its excellency, though it cannot pass from his mind into any other expression or words than those in which he finds it. When Phædria, in the *Eunuch*, had a command from his mistress to be absent two days, and, encouraging himself to go through with it, said, *Tandem ego non illa caream, si sit opus, vel totum*

triduum?—Parmeno, to mock the softness of his master, lifting up his hands and eyes, cries out, as it were in admiration, *Hui! universum triduum!* the elegancy of which *universum*, though it cannot be rendered in our language, yet leaves an impression on our souls: but this happens seldom in him; in Plautus oftener, who is infinitely too bold in his metaphors and coining words, out of which many times his wit is nothing; which questionless was one reason why Horace falls upon him so severely in those verses:

> *Sed proavi nostri Plautinos et numeros et*
> *Laudavere sales, nimium patiemter utrumque,*
> *Ne dicam stolidè.*

For Horace himself was cautious to obtrude a new word on his readers, and makes custom and common use the best measure of receiving it into our writings:

> *Multa renascentur quæ nunc [jam] cecidere, cadentque*
> *Quæ nunc sunt in honore vocabula, si volet usus,*
> *Quem penes arbitrium est, et jus, et norma loquendi.*

The not observing this rule is that which the world has blamed in our satyrist, Cleveland: to express a thing hard and unnaturally, is his new way of elocution. 'Tis true, no poet but may sometimes use a catachresis: Virgil does it—

> *Mistaque ridenti colocasia fundet acantho—*

in his eclogue of Pollio; and in his seventh Æneid

——mirantur et undæ,
Miratur nemus insuetum fulgentia louge
Scuta virum fluvio pictasque innare carinas.

And Ovid once so modestly, that he asks leave to do it:

——quem, si verbo audacia detur,
Haud metuam summi dixisse Palatia cæli.

calling the court of Jupiter by the name of Augustus his palace; though in another place he is more bold, where he says,—*et longas visent Capitolia pompas.* But to do this always, and never be able to write a line without it, though it may be admired by some few pedants, will not pass upon those who know that wit is best conveyed to us in the most easy language; and is most to be admired when a great thought comes dressed in words so commonly received, that it is understood by the meanest apprehensions, as the best meat is the most easily digested: but we cannot read a verse of Cleveland's without making a face at it, as if every word were a pill to swallow: he gives us many times a hard nut to break our teeth, without a kernel for our pains. So that there is this difference betwixt his Satires and doctor Donne's; that the one gives us deep thoughts in common language, though rough cadence; the other gives us common thoughts in abstruse words:

'tis true, in some places his wit is independent of his words, as in that of the rebel Scot:

> Had Cain been Scot, God would have chang'd his doom;
> Not forc'd him wander, but confin'd him home.

Si sic omnia dixisset! This is wit in all languages: it is like Mercury, never to be lost or killed:—and so that other—

> For beauty, like white powder, makes no noise,
> And yet the silent hypocrite destroys.

You see the last line is highly metaphorical, but it is so soft and gentle, that it does not shock us as we read it.

"But, to return from whence I have digressed, to the consideration of the ancients' writing, and their wit (of which by this time you will grant us in some measure to be fit judges). Though I see many excellent thoughts in Seneca, yet he of them who had a genius most proper for the stage, was Ovid; he had a way of writing so fit to stir up a pleasing admiration and concernment, which are the objects of a tragedy, and to shew the various movements of a soul combating betwixt two different passions, that, had he lived in our age, or in his own could have writ with our advantages, no man but must have yielded to him; and therefore I am confident the *Medea* is none of his: for, though I esteem it for the gravity and sententiousness of it, which he him-

self concludes to be suitable to a tragedy,—*Omne genus scripti gravitate tragœdia vincit*,—yet it moves not my soul enough to judge that he, who in the epick way wrote things so near the drama as the story of Myrrha, of Caunus and Biblis, and the rest, should stir up no more concernment where he most endeavoured it. The master-piece of Seneca I hold to be that scene in the *Troades*, where Ulysses is seeking for Astyanax to kill him: there you see the tenderness of a mother so represented in Andromache, that it raises compassion to a high degree in the reader, and bears the nearest resemblance of any thing in the tragedies of the ancients to the excellent scenes of passion in Shakspeare, or in Fletcher: for love-scenes, you will find few among them; their tragick poets dealt not with that soft passion, but with lust, cruelty, revenge, ambition, and those bloody actions they produced; which were more capable of raising horrour than compassion in an audience: leaving love untouched, whose gentleness would have tempered them; which is the most frequent of all the passions, and which, being the private concernment of every person, is soothed by viewing its own image in a publick entertainment.

"Among their comedies, we find a scene or two of tenderness, and that where you would least expect it, in Plautus; but to speak generally, their lovers say little, when they see each other, but *anima mea vita mea*; Ζωὴ καὶ ψυχή, as the women in Juvenal's time used to cry out in the fury of their kindness. Any

sudden gust of passion (as an extasy of love in an unexpected meeting) cannot better be expressed than in a word and a sigh, breaking one another. Nature is dumb on such occasions; and to make her speak, would be to represent her unlike herself. But there are a thousand other concernments of lovers, as jealousies, complaints, contrivances, and the like, where not to open their minds at large to each other, were to be wanting to their own love, and to the expectation of the audience; who watch the movements of their minds, as much as the changes of their fortunes. For the imaging of the first is properly the work of a poet; the latter he borrows from the historian."

Eugenius was proceeding in that part of his discourse, when Crites interrupted him. "I see," said he, "Eugenius and I are never like to have this question decided betwixt us; for he maintains, the moderns have acquired a new perfection in writing; I can only grant they have altered the mode of it. Homer described his heroes men of great appetites, lovers of beef broiled upon the coals, and good fellows; contrary to the practice of the French Romances, whose heroes neither eat, nor drink, nor sleep, for love. Virgil makes Æneas a bold avower of his own virtues:

Sum pius Æneas, fama super æthera notus;

which, in the civility of our poets is the character of a fanfaron or Hector: for with us the knight takes occasion to walk out, or sleep, to avoid the vanity of

telling his own story, which the trusty 'squire is ever to perform for him. So in their love-scenes, of which Eugenius spoke last, the ancients were more hearty, we more talkative: they writ love as it was then the mode to make it; and I will grant thus much to Eugenius, that perhaps one of their poets, had he lived in our age, *si foret hoc nostrum fato delapsus in ævum*, (as Horace says of Lucilius) he had altered many things; not that they were not natural before, but that he might accommodate himself to the age in which he lived. Yet in the mean time, we are not to conclude any thing rashly against those great men, but preserve to them the dignity of masters, and give that honour to their memories, *quos Libitina sacravit*, part of which we expect may be paid to us in future times."

This moderation of Crites, as it was pleasing to all the company, so it put an end to that dispute; which Eugenius, who seemed to have the better of the argument, would urge no farther: but Lisideius, after he had acknowledged himself of Eugenius his opinion concerning the ancient, yet told him, he had forborne, till his discourse were ended, to ask him why he preferred the English plays above those of other nations? and whether we ought not to submit our stage to the exactness of our next neighbours?

"Though," said Eugenius, "I am at all times ready to defend the honour of my country against the French, and to maintain, we are as well able to vanquish them with our pens, as our ancestors have been

with their swords; yet, if you please," added he, looking upon Neander, "I will commit this cause to my friend's management; his opinion of our plays is the same with mine: and besides, there is no reason, that Crites and I, who have now left the stage, should re-enter so suddenly upon it; which is against the laws of comedy."

"If the question had been stated," replied Lisideius, "who had writ best, the French or English, forty years ago, I should have been of your opinion, and adjudged the honour to our own nation; but since that time," (said he, turning towards Neander,) "we have been so long together bad Englishmen, that we had not leisure to be good poets. Beaumont, Fletcher, and Johnson, (who were only capable of bringing us to that degree of perfection which we have,) were just then leaving the world; as if in an age of so much horrour, wit, and those milder studies of humanity, had no farther business among us. But the Muses, who ever follow peace, went to plant in another country: it was then, that the great Cardinal of Richelieu began to take them into his protection; and that, by his encouragement, Corneille, and some other Frenchmen, reformed their theatre (which before was as much below ours, as it now surpasses it and the rest of Europe). But because Crites in his discourse for the ancients has prevented me, by observing many rules of the stage which the moderns have borrowed from them, I shall only, in short, demand of you, whether you are not convinced that

of all nations the French have best observed them? In the unity of time you find them so scrupulous, that it yet remains a dispute among their poets, whether the artificial day of twelve hours, more or less, be not meant by Aristotle, rather than the natural one of twenty-four; and consequently, whether all plays ought not to be reduced into that compass. This I can testify, that in all their dramas writ within these last twenty years and upwards, I have not observed any that have extended the time to thirty hours: in the unity of place they are full as scrupulous; for many of their criticks limit it to that very spot of ground where the play is supposed to begin; none of them exceed the compass of the same town or city. The unity of action in all plays is yet more conspicuous; for they do not burden them with under-plots, as the English do, which is the reason why many scenes of our tragi-comedies carry on a design that is nothing of kin to the main plot; and that we see two distinct webs in a play, like those in ill-wrought stuffs; and two actions, that is, two plays, carried on together, to the confounding of the audience; who, before they are warm in their concernments for one part, are diverted to another; and by that means espouse the interest of neither. From hence likewise it arises, that the one half of our actors are not known to the other. They keep their distances, as if they were Mountagues and Capulets, and seldom begin an acquaintance till the last scene of the fifth act, when they are all to meet

upon the stage. There is no theatre in the world has anything so absurd as the English tragi-comedy; 'tis a drama of our own invention, and the fashion of it is enough to proclaim it so; here a course of mirth, there another of sadness and passion, and a third of honour and a duel: thus, in two hours and a half, we run through all the fits of Bedlam. The French affords you as much variety on the same day, but they do it not so unseasonably, or *mal à propos*, as we: our poets present you the play and the farce together; and our stages still retain somewhat of the original civility of the Red Bull:

Atque ursum et pugiles media inter carmina poscunt.

The end of tragedies or serious plays, says Aristotle, is to beget admiration, compassion, or concernment; but are not mirth and compassion things incompatible? and is it not evident that the poet must of necessity destroy the former by intermingling of the latter? that is, he must ruin the sole end and object of his tragedy, to introduce somewhat that is forced into it, and is not of the body of it. Would you not think that physician mad, who, having prescribed a purge, should immediately order you to take restringents?

But to leave our plays, and return to theirs. I have noted one great advantage they have had in the plotting of their tragedies; that is, they are always grounded upon some known history: according to that of Horace, *Ex noto fictum carmen sequar;* and in that they have so imitated the ancients, that they have

surpassed them. For the ancients, as was observed before, took for the foundation of their plays some poetical fiction, such as under that consideration could move but little concernment in the audience, because they already knew the event of it. But the French goes farther:

Atque ita mentitur, sic veris falsa remiget,
Primo ne medium, medio ne discrepet imum.

He so interweaves truth with probable fiction, that he puts a pleasing fallacy upon us; mends the intrigues of fate, and dispenses with the severity of history, to reward that virtue which has been rendered to us there unfortunate. Sometimes the story has left the success so doubtful, that the writer is free, by the privilege of a poet, to take that which of two or more relations will best suit with his design: as for example, in the death of Cyrus, whom Justin and some others report to have perished in the Scythian war, but Xenophon affirms to have died in his bed of extreme old age. Nay more, when the event is past dispute, even then we are willing to be deceived, and the poet, if he contrives it with appearance of truth, has all the audience of his party; at least during the time his play is acting: so naturally we are kind to virtue, when our own interest is not in question, that we take it up as the general concernment of mankind. On the other side, if you consider the historical plays of Shakspeare, they are rather so many chronicles of kings, or the business many times

of thirty or forty years, cramped into a representation of two hours and a half; which is not to imitate or paint nature, but rather to draw her in miniature, to take her in little; to look upon her through the wrong end of a perspective, and receive her images not only much less, but infinitely more imperfect than the life: this, instead of making a play delightful, renders it ridiculous:—

Quodcunque ostendis mihi sic, incredulus odi.

For the spirit of man cannot be satisfied but with truth, or at least verisimility; and a poem is to contain, if not τὰ ἔτυμα, yet ἐτύμοισιν ὁμοῖα, as one of the Greek poets has expressed it.

"Another thing in which the French differ from us and from the Spaniards, is that they do not embarrass, or cumber themselves with too much plot; they only represent so much of a story as will constitute one whole and great action sufficient for a play; we, who undertake more, do but multiply adventures; which, not being produced from one another, as effects from causes, but barely following, constitute many actions in the drama, and consequently make it many plays.

"But by pursuing closely one argument, which is not cloyed with many turns, the French have gained more liberty for verse, in which they write; they have leisure to dwell on a subject which deserves it; and to represent the passions, (which we have acknowledged to be the poet's work,) without being hurried from one thing to another, as we are in the plays

of Calderon, which we have seen lately upon our theatres, under the name of Spanish plots. I have taken notice but of one tragedy of ours, whose plot has that uniformity and unity of design in it, which I have commended in the French; and that is *Rollo*, or rather, under the name of Rollo, the Story of Bassianus and Geta in Herodian: there indeed the plot is neither large nor intricate, but just enough to fill the minds of the audience, not to cloy them. Besides, you see it founded upon the truth of history, —only the time of the action is not reduceable to the strictness of the rules; and you see in some places a little farce mingled, which is below the dignity of the other parts; and in this all our poets are extremely peccant: even Ben Johnson himself, in *Sejanus* and *Catiline*, has given us this oleo of a play, this unnatural mixture of comedy and tragedy; which to me sounds just as ridiculously as the history of David with the merry humours of Golia's. In *Sejanus* you may take notice of the scene betwixt Livia and the physician which is a pleasant satire upon the artificial helps of beauty: in *Catiline* you may see the parliament of women; the little envies of them to one another; and all that passes betwixt Curio and Fulvia: scenes admirable in their kind, but of an ill mingle with the rest.

"But I return again to the French writers, who, as I have said, do not burden themselves too much with plot, which has been reproached to them by an ingenious person of our nation as a fault; for, he says,

they commonly make but one person considerable in a play; they dwell on him, and his concernments, while the rest of the persons are only subservient to set him off. If he intends this by it,—that there is one person in the play who is of greater dignity than the rest, he must tax, not only theirs, but those of the ancients, and which he would be loth to do, the best of ours; for it is impossible but that one person must be more conspicuous in it than any other, and consequently the greatest share in the action must devolve on him. We see it so in the management of all affairs; even in the most equal aristocracy, the balance cannot be so justly poised, but some one will be superior to the rest, either in parts, fortune, interest, or the consideration of some glorious exploit; which will reduce the greatest part of business into his hands.

"But, if he would have us to imagine, that in exalting one character the rest of them are neglected, and that all of them have not some share or other in the action of the play, I desire him to produce any of Corneille's tragedies, wherein every person, like so many servants in a well-governed family, has not some employment, and who is not necessary to the carrying on of the plot, or at least to your understanding it.

"There are indeed some protatick persons in the ancients, whom they make use of in their plays, either to hear or give the relation: but the French avoid this with great address, making their narrations only to, or by such, who are some way interested in the

main design. And now I am speaking of relations, I cannot take a fitter opportunity to add this in favour of the French, that they often use them with better judgment and more *à propos* than the English do. Not that I commend narrations in general,—but there are two sorts of them. One, of those things which are antecedent to the play, and are related to make the conduct of it more clear to us. But 'tis a fault to choose such subjects for the stage as will force us on that rock, because we see they are seldom listened to by the audience, and that is many times the ruin of the play; for, being once let pass without attention, the audience can never recover themselves to understand the plot: and indeed it is somewhat unreasonable that they should be put to so much trouble, as that, to comprehend what passes in their sight, they must have recourse to what was done, perhaps, ten or twenty years ago.

"But there is another sort of relations, that is, of things happening in the action of the play, and supposed to be done behind the scenes; and this is many times both convenient and beautiful; for by it the French avoid the tumult to which we are subject in England, by representing duels, battles, and the like; which renders our stage too like the theatres where they fight prizes. For what is more ridiculous than to represent an army with a drum and five men behind it; all which the hero of the other side is to drive in before him; or to see a duel fought, and one slain with two or three thrusts of the foils, which

we know are so blunted, that we might give a man an hour to kill another in good earnest with them.

"I have observed that in all our tragedies, the audience cannot forbear laughing when the actors are to die; it is the most comick part of the whole play. All *passions* may be lively represented on the stage, if to the well-writing of them the actor supplies a good commanded voice, and limbs that move easily, and without stiffness; but there are many *actions* which can never be imitated to a just height: dying especially is a thing which none but a Roman gladiator could naturally perform on the stage, when he did not imitate or represent, but do it; and therefore it is better to omit the representation of it.

"The words of a good writer, which describe it lively, will make a deeper impression of belief in us than all the actor can insinuate into us, when he seems to fall dead before us; as a poet in the description of a beautiful garden, or a meadow, will please our imagination more than the place itself can please our sight. When we see death represented, we are convinced it is but fiction; but when we hear it related, our eyes, the strongest witnesses, are wanting, which might have undeceived us; and we are all willing to favour the sleight, when the poet does not too grossly impose on us. They therefore who imagine these relations would make no concernment in the audience, are deceived, by confounding them with the other, which are of things antecedent to the play: those are

made often in cold blood, as I may say, to the audience; but these are warmed with our concernments, which were before awakened in the play. What the philosophers say of motion, that, when it is once begun, it continues of itself, and will do so to eternity, without some stop put to it, is clearly true on this occasion: the soul, being already moved with the characters and fortunes of those imaginary persons, continues going of its own accord; and we are no more weary to hear what becomes of them when they are not on the stage, than we are to listen to the news of an absent mistress. But it is objected, that if one part of the play may be related, then why not all? I answer, some parts of the action are more fit to be represented, some to be related. Corneille says judiciously, that the poet is not obliged to expose to view all particular actions which conduce to the principal: he ought to select such of them to be seen, which will appear with the greatest beauty, either by the magnificence of the show, or the vehemence of passions which they produce, or some other charm which they have in them; and let the rest arrive to the audience by narration. 'Tis a great mistake in us to believe the French present no part of the action on the stage; every alteration or crossing of a design, every new-sprung passion, and turn of it, is a part of the action, and much the noblest, except we conceive nothing to be action till the players come to blows; as if the painting of the hero's mind were not more properly the poet's work than the strength of his body. Nor does this

anything contradict the opinion of Horace, where he tells us,

Segnius irritant animos demissa per aurem,
Quam quæ sunt oculis subjecta fidelibus.

For he says immediately after,

——————Non tamen intus
Digna geri promes in scenam ; multaq ; *tolles*
Ex oculis, quæ mox narret facundia præsens.

Among which many he recounts some :

Nec pueros coram populo Medea trucidet,
Aut in avem Progne mutetur, Cadmus in anguem ; &c.

That is, those actions which by reason of their cruelty will cause aversion in us, or by reason of their impossibility, unbelief, ought either wholly to be avoided by a poet, or only delivered by narration. To which we may have leave to add, such as, to avoid tumult, (as was before hinted,) or to reduce the plot into a more reasonable compass of time, or for defect of beauty in them, are rather to be related than presented to the eye. Examples of all these kinds are frequent, not only among all the ancients, but in the best received of our English poets. We find Ben Johnson using them in his *Magnetick Lady*, where one comes out from dinner, and relates the quarrels and disorders of it, to save the undecent appearance of them on the stage, and to abbreviate the story; and this in express imitation of Terence, who had done the

same before him in his *Eunuch*, where Pythias makes the like relation of what had happened within at the Soldiers' entertainment. The relations likewise of Sejanus's death, and the prodigies before it, are remarkable; the one of which was hid from sight, to avoid the horrour and tumult of the representation; the other, to shun the introducing of things impossible to be believed. In that excellent play, *The King and no King*, Fletcher goes yet farther; for the whole unravelling of the plot is done by narration in the fifth act, after the manner of the ancients; and it moves great concernment in the audience, though it be only a relation of what was done many years before the play. I could multiply other instances, but these are sufficient to prove that there is no errour in choosing a subject which requires this sort of narrations; in the ill management of them, there may.

"But I find I have been too long in this discourse, since the French have many other excellencies not common to us; as that you never see any of their plays end with a conversion, or simple change of will, which is the ordinary way which our poets use to end theirs. It shews little art in the conclusion of a dramatick poem, when they who have hindered the felicity during the four acts, desist from it in the fifth, without some powerful cause to take them off their design; and though I deny not but such reasons may be found, yet it is a path that is cautiously to be trod, and the poet is to be sure he convinces the

audience that the motive is strong enough. As for example, the conversion of the Usurer in *The Scornful Lady*, seems to me a little forced; for, being an Usurer, which implies a lover of money to the highest degree of covetousness, — and such the poet has represented him,—the account he gives for the sudden change is, that he has been duped by the wild young fellow; which in reason might render him more wary another time, and make him punish himself with harder fare and coarser clothes, to get up again what he had lost: but that he should look on it as a judgment, and so repent, we may expect to hear in a sermon, but I should never endure it in a play.

"I pass by this; neither will I insist on the care they take, that no person after his first entrance shall ever appear, but the business which brings him upon the stage shall be evident; which rule, if observed, must needs render all the events in the play more natural; for there you see the probability of every accident, in the cause that produced it; and that which appears chance in the play, will seem so reasonable to you, that you will there find it almost necessary: so that in the exit of the actor you have a clear account of his purpose and design in the next entrance; (though, if the scene be well wrought, the event will commonly deceive you;) for there is nothing so absurd, says Corneille, as for an actor to leave the stage, only because he has no more to say.

"I should now speak of the beauty of their rhyme,

and the just reason I have to prefer that way of writing in tragedies before ours in blank verse; but because it is partly received by us, and therefore not altogether peculiar to them, I will say no more of it in relation to their plays. For our own, I doubt not but it will exceedingly beautify them; and I can see but one reason why it should not generally obtain, that is, because our poets write so ill in it. This indeed may prove a more prevailing argument than all others which are used to destroy it, and therefore I am only troubled when great and judicious poets, and those who are acknowledged such, have writ or spoke against it: as for others, they are to be answered by that one sentence of an ancient author:— *Sed ut primo ad consequendos eos quos priores ducimus, accendimur, ita ubi aut proeteriri, aut æquari eos posse desperavimus, studium cum spe senescit: quod, scilicet, assequi non potest, sequi desinit; . . . praeteritoque eo in quo eminere non possumus, aliquid in quo nitamur, conquirimus.*"

Lisideius concluded in this manner; and Neander, after a little pause, thus answered him:

"I shall grant Lisideius, without much dispute, a great part of what he has urged against us; for I acknowledge that the French contrive their plots more regularly, and observe the laws of comedy, and decorum of the stage, (to speak generally,) with more exactness than the English. Farther, I deny not but he has taxed us justly in some irregularities of ours, which he has mentioned; yet, after all, I am of

opinion that neither our faults nor their virtues are considerable enough to place them above us.

"For the lively imitation of nature being in the definition of a play, those which best fulfil that law ought to be esteemed superior to the others. 'Tis true, those beauties of the French poesy are such as will raise perfection higher where it is, but are not sufficient to give it where it is not: they are indeed the beauties of a statue, but not of a man, because not animated with the soul of poesy, which is imitation of humour and passions: and this Lisideius himself, or any other, however biassed to their party, cannot but acknowledge, if he will either compare the humours of our comedies, or the characters of our serious plays, with theirs. He who will look upon theirs which have been written till these last ten years, or thereabouts, will find it an hard matter to pick out two or three passable humours amongst them. Corneille himself, their arch-poet, what has he produced except *The Liar*, and you know how it was cried up in France; but when it came upon the English stage, though well translated, and that part of Dorant acted to so much advantage as I am confident it never received in its own country, the most favourable to it would not put it in competition with many of Fletcher's or Ben Johnson's. In the rest of Corneille's comedies you have little humour; he tells you himself, his way is, first to shew two lovers in good intelligence with each other; in the working up of the play to embroil them by some

mistake, and in the latter end to clear it, and reconcile them.

"But of late years Moliere, the younger Corneille, Quinault, and some others, have been imitating afar off the quick turns and graces of the English stage. They have mixed their serious plays with mirth, like our tragi-comedies, since the death of Cardinal Richelieu; which Lisideius and many others not observing, have commended that in them for a virtue which they themselves no longer practise. Most of their new plays are, like some of ours, derived from the Spanish novels. There is scarce one of them without a veil, and a trusty Diego, who drolls much after the rate of *The Adventures*. But their humours, if I may grace them with that name, are so thin-sown, that never above one of them comes up in any play. I dare take upon me to find more variety of them in some one play of Ben Johnson's, than in all theirs together; as he who has seen *The Alchemist*, *The Silent Woman*, or *Bartholomew-Fair*, cannot but acknowledge with me.

"I grant the French have performed what was possible on the ground-work of the Spanish plays; what was pleasant before, they have made regular: but there is not above one good play to be writ on all those plots; they are too much alike to please often; which we need not the experience of our own stage to justify. As for their new way of mingling mirth with serious plot, I do not, with Lisideius, condemn the thing, though I cannot approve their manner

of doing it. He tells us, we cannot so speedily recollect ourselves after a scene of great passion and concernment, as to pass to another of mirth and humour, and to enjoy it with any relish: but why should he imagine the soul of man more heavy than his senses? Does not the eye pass from an unpleasant object to a pleasant in a much shorter time than is required to this? and does not the unpleasantness of the first commend the beauty of the latter? The old rule of logick might have convinced him, that contraries, when placed near, set off each other. A continued gravity keeps the spirit too much bent; we must refresh it sometimes, as we bait in a journey that we may go on with greater ease. A scene of mirth, mixed with tragedy, has the same effect upon us which our musick has betwixt the acts; which we find a relief to us from the best plots and language of the stage, if the discourses have been long. I must therefore have stronger arguments, ere I am convinced that compassion and mirth in the same subject destroy each other; and in the mean time cannot but conclude, to the honour of our nation, that we have invented, increased, and perfected a more pleasant way of writing for the stage, than was ever known to the ancients or moderns of any nation, which is tragi-comedy.

"And this leads me to wonder why Lisideius and many others should cry up the barrenness of the French plots, above the variety and copiousness of the English. Their plots are single; they carry on

one design, which is pushed forward by all the actors, every scene in the play contributing and moving towards it. Our plays, besides the main design, have under-plots or by-concernments, of less considerable persons and intrigues, which are carried on with the motion of the main plot: as they say the orb of the fixed stars, and those of the planets, though they have motions of their own, are whirled about by the motion of the *primum mobile*, in which they are contained. That similitude expresses much of the English stage; for if contrary motions may be found in nature to agree; if a planet can go east and west at the same time;—one way by virtue of his own motion, the other by the force of the first mover;—it will not be difficult to imagine how the under-plot, which is only different, not contrary to the great design, may naturally be conducted along with it.

"Eugenius has already shewn us, from the confession of the French poets, that the unity of action is sufficiently preserved, if all the imperfect actions of the play are conducing to the main design; but when those petty intrigues of a play are so ill ordered, that they have no coherence with the other, I must grant that Lisideius has reason to tax that want of due connexion; for co-ordination in a play is as dangerous and unnatural as in a state. In the mean time he must acknowledge, our variety, if well ordered, will afford a greater pleasure to the audience.

"As for his other argument, that by pursuing one single theme they gain an advantage to express and

work up the passions, I wish any example he could bring from them would make it good; for I confess their verses are to me the coldest I have ever read. Neither, indeed, is it possible for them, in the way they take, so to express passion, as that the effects of it should appear in the concernment of an audience, their speeches being so many declamations, which tire us with the length; so that instead of persuading us to grieve for their imaginary heroes, we are concerned for our own trouble, as we are in tedious visits of bad company; we are in pain till they are gone. When the French stage came to be reformed by Cardinal Richelieu, those long harangues were introduced to comply with the gravity of a churchman. Look upon the *Cinna* and the *Pompey*; they are not so properly to be called plays, as long discourses of reason of state; and *Polieucte* in matters of religion is as solemn as the long stops upon our organs. Since that time it is grown into a custom, and their actors speak by the hour-glass, like our parsons; nay, they account it the grace of their parts, and think themselves disparaged by the poet, if they may not twice or thrice in a play entertain the audience with a speech of an hundred lines. I deny not but this may suit well enough with the French; for as we, who are a more sullen people, come to be diverted at our plays, so they, who are of an airy and gay temper, come thither to make themselves more serious: and this I conceive to be one reason why comedies are more pleasing to us, and tragedies

to them. But to speak generally: it cannot be denied that short speeches and replies are more apt to move the passions and beget concernment in us, than the other; for it is unnatural for any one in a gust of passion to speak long together, or for another in the same condition to suffer him, without interruption. Grief and passion are like floods raised in little brooks by a sudden rain; they are quickly up; and if the concernment be poured unexpectedly in upon us, it overflows us: but a long sober shower gives them leisure to run out as they came in, without troubling the ordinary current. As for comedy, repartee is one of its chiefest graces; the greatest pleasure of the audience is a chace of wit, kept up on both sides, and swiftly managed. And this our forefathers, if not we, have had in Fletcher's plays, to a much higher degree of perfection than the French poets can reasonably hope to reach.

"There is another part of Lisideius his discourse, in which he rather excused our neighbours, than commended them; that is, for aiming only to make one person considerable in their plays. 'Tis very true what he has urged, that one character in all plays, even without the poet's care, will have advantage of all the others; and that the design of the whole drama will chiefly depend on it. But this hinders not that there may be more shining characters in the play: many persons of a second magnitude, nay, some so very near, so almost equal to the first, that greatness may be opposed to greatness, and all

the persons be made considerable, not only by their quality, but their action. 'Tis evident that the more the persons are, the greater will be the variety of the plot. If then the parts are managed so regularly, that the beauty of the whole be kept entire, and that the variety become not a perplexed and confused mass of accidents, you will find it infinitely pleasing to be led in a labyrinth of design, where you see some of your way before you, yet discern not the end till you arrive at it. And that all this is practicable, I can produce for examples many of our English plays: as *The Maid's Tragedy*, *The Alchemist*, *The Silent Woman*: I was going to have named *The Fox*, but that the unity of design seems not exactly observed in it; for there appear two actions in the play; the first naturally ending with the fourth act; the second forced from it in the fifth: which yet is the less to be condemned in him, because the disguise of Volpone, though it suited not with his character as a crafty or covetous person, agreed well enough with that of a voluptuary; and by it the poet gained the end at which he aym'd, the punishment of vice, and the reward of virtue, both which that disguise produced. So that to judge equally of it, it was an excellent fifth act, but not so naturally proceeding from the former.

"But to leave this, and pass to the latter part of Lisideius his discourse, which concerns relations: I must acknowledge with him, that the French have reason to hide that part of the action which would

occasion too much tumult on the stage, and to choose rather to have it made known by narration to the audience. Farther, I think it very convenient, for the reasons he has given, that all incredible actions were removed; but whether custom has so insinuated itself into our countrymen, or nature has so formed them to fierceness, I know not; but they will scarcely suffer combats and other objects of horrour to be taken from them. And indeed, the indecency of tumults is all which can be objected against fighting: for why may not our imagination as well suffer itself to be deluded with the probability of it, as with any other thing in the play? For my part, I can with as great ease persuade myself that the blows are given in good earnest, as I can, that they who strike them are kings or princes, or those persons which they represent. For objects of incredibility,—I would be satisfied from Lisideius, whether we have any so removed from all appearance of truth, as are those of Corneille's *Andromede*; a play which has been frequented the most of any he has writ. If the Perseus, or the son of an heathen god, the Pegasus, and the Monster, were not capable to choke a strong belief, let him blame any representation of ours hereafter. Those indeed were objects of delight; yet the reason is the same as to the probability: for he makes it not a Ballette or masque, but a play, which is to resemble truth. But for death, that it ought not to be represented, I have, besides the arguments alledged by Lisideius, the authority of

Ben Johnson, who has forborn it in his tragedies; for both the death of Sejanus and Catiline are related: though in the latter I cannot but observe one irregularity of that great poet; he has removed the scene in the same act from Rome to Catiline's army, and from thence again to Rome; and besides, has allowed a very inconsiderable time, after Catiline's speech, for the striking of the battle, and the return of Petreius, who is to relate the event of it to the senate: which I should not animadvert on him, who was otherwise a painful observer of τὸ πρέπον, or the *decorum* of the stage, if he had not used extreme severity in his judgment on the incomparable Shakspeare for the same fault.—To conclude on this subject of relations; if we are to be blamed for shewing too much of the action, the French are as faulty for discovering too little of it: a mean betwixt both should be observed by every judicious writer, so as the audience may neither be left unsatisfied by not seeing what is beautiful, or shocked by beholding what is either incredible or undecent.

"I hope I have already proved in this discourse, that though we are not altogether so punctual as the French, in observing the laws of comedy, yet our errours are so few, and little, and those things wherein we excel them so considerable, that we ought of right to be preferred before them. But what will Lisideius say, if they themselves acknowledge they are too strictly bounded by those laws, for breaking which he has blamed the English?

I will alledge Corneille's words, as I find them in the end of his Discourse of the three Unities:—*Il est facile aux spéculatifs d'estre sévères, &c.* 'Tis easy for speculative persons to judge severely; but if they would produce to publick view ten or twelve pieces of this nature, they would perhaps give more latitude to the rules than I have done, when by experience, they had known how much we are limited and constrained by them, and how many beauties of the stage they banished from it.' To illustrate a little what he has said:—By their servile observations of the unities of time and place, and integrity of scenes, they have brought on themselves that dearth of plot, and narrowness of imagination, which may be observed in all their plays. How many beautiful accidents might naturally happen in two or three days, which cannot arrive with any probability in the compass of twenty-four hours? There is time to be allowed also for maturity of design, which, amongst great and prudent persons, such as are often represented in tragedy, cannot, with any likelihood of truth, be brought to pass at so short a warning. Farther; by tying themselves strictly to the unity of place, and unbroken scenes, they are forced many times to omit some beauties which cannot be shewn where the act began; but might, if the scene were interrupted, and the stage cleared for the persons to enter in another place; and therefore the French poets are often forced upon absurdities; for if the act begins in a chamber, all the persons in the play

must have some business or other to come thither, or else they are not to be shewn that act; and sometimes their characters are very unfitting to appear there: as, suppose it were the king's bed-chamber; yet the meanest man in the tragedy must come and dispatch his business there, rather than in the lobby or courtyard, (which is fitter for him,) for fear the stage should be cleared, and the scenes broken. Many times they fall by it in a greater inconvenience; for they keep their scenes unbroken, and yet change the place; as in one of their newest plays, where the act begins in the street. There a gentleman is to meet his friend; he sees him with his man, coming out from his father's house; they talk together, and the first goes out: the second, who is a lover, has made an appointment with his mistress; she appears at the window, and then we are to imagine the scene lies under it. This gentleman is called away, and leaves his servant with his mistress; presently her father is heard from within; the young lady is afraid the servingman should be discovered, and thrusts him into a place of safety, which is supposed to be her closet. After this, the father enters to the daughter, and now the scene is in a house; for he is seeking from one room to another for this poor Philipin, or French Diego, who is heard from within, drolling and breaking many a miserable conceit on the subject of his sad condition. In this ridiculous manner the play goes forward, the stage being never empty all the while: so that the street, the window, the houses,

and the closet, are made to walk about, and the persons to stand still. Now what, I beseech you, is more easy than to write a regular French play, or more difficult than to write an irregular English one, like those of Fletcher, or of Shakspeare?

"If they content themselves, as Corneille did, with some flat design, which, like an ill riddle, is found out ere it be half proposed, such plots we can make every way regular, as easily as they; but whenever they endeavour to rise to any quick turns and counterturns of plot, as some of them have attempted, since Corneille's plays have been less in vogue, you see they write as irregularly as we, though they cover it more speciously. Hence the reason is perspicuous, why no French plays, when translated, have, or ever can succeed on the English stage. For, if you consider the plots, our own are fuller of variety; if the writing, ours are more quick and fuller of spirit; and therefore 'tis a strange mistake in those who decry the way of writing plays in verse, as if the English therein imitated the French. We have borrowed nothing from them; our plots are weaved in English looms: we endeavour therein to follow the variety and greatness of characters which are derived to us from Shakspeare and Fletcher; the copiousness and well-knitting of the intrigues we have from Johnson; and for the verse itself we have English precedents of elder date than any of Corneille's plays. Not to name our old comedies before Shakspeare, which were all writ in verse of six feet, or Alexandrines,

such as the French now use,—I can shew in Shakspeare many scenes of rhyme together, and the like in Ben Johnson's tragedies: in *Catiline* and *Sejanus* sometimes thirty or forty lines,—I mean besides the Chorus, or the monologues; which, by the way, shewed Ben no enemy to this way of writing, especially if you read his *Sad Shepherd*, which goes sometimes on rhyme, sometimes on blank verse, like an horse who eases himself on trot and amble. You find him likewise commending Fletcher's pastoral of *The Faithful Shepherdess*, which is for the most part rhyme, though not refined to that purity to which it hath since been brought. And these examples are enough to clear us from a servile imitation of the French.

"But to return whence I have digressed: I dare boldly affirm these two things of the English drama;—First, that we have many plays of ours as regular as any of theirs, and which, besides, have more variety of plot and characters; and secondly, that in most of the irregular plays of Shakspeare or Fletcher, (for Ben Johnson's are for the most part regular,) there is a more masculine fancy and greater spirit in the writing, than there is in any of the French. I could produce, even in Shakspeare's and Fletcher's works, some plays which are almost exactly formed; as *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, and *The Scornful Lady*: but because (generally speaking) Shakspeare, who writ first, did not perfectly observe the laws of comedy, and Fletcher, who came nearer to perfection,

yet through carelessness made many faults; I will take the pattern of a perfect play from Ben Johnson, who was a careful and learned observer of the dramatick laws, and from all his comedies I shall select *The Silent Woman*; of which I will make a short examen, according to those rules which the French observe."

As Neander was beginning to examine *The Silent Woman*, Eugenius, earnestly regarding him; "I beseech you, Neander," said he, "gratify the company, and me in particular, so far, as before you speak of the play, to give us a character of the author; and tell us frankly your opinion, whether you do not think all writers, both French and English, ought to give place to him."

"I fear," replied Neander, "that in obeying your commands I shall draw some envy on myself. Besides, in performing them, it will be first necessary to speak somewhat of Shakspeare and Fletcher, his rivals in poesy; and one of them, in my opinion, at least his equal, perhaps his superior.

"To begin, then, with Shakspeare. He was the man who of all modern, and perhaps ancient poets, had the largest and most comprehensive soul. All the images of nature were still present to him, and he drew them, not laboriously, but luckily; when he describes any thing, you more than see it, you feel it too. Those who accuse him to have wanted learning, give him the greater commendation: he was naturally learned; he needed not the spectacles

of books to read nature; he looked inwards, and found her there. I cannot say he is every where alike; were he so, I should do him injury to compare him with the greatest of mankind. He is many times flat, insipid; his comick wit degenerating into clenches, his serious swelling into bombast. But he is always great, when some great occasion is presented to him; no man can say he ever had a fit subject for his wit, and did not then raise himself as high above the rest of poets,

Quantum lenta solent inter viburna cupressi.

The consideration of this made Mr Hales of Eaton say, that there was no subject of which any poet ever writ, but he would produce it much better done in Shakspeare; and however others are now generally preferred before him, yet the age wherein he lived, which had contemporaries with him Fletcher and Johnson, never equalled them to him in their esteem: and in the last king's court, when Ben's reputation was at highest, Sir John Suckling, and with him the greater part of the courtiers, set our Shakspeare far above him.

Beaumont and Fletcher, of whom I am next to speak, had, with the advantage of Shakspeare's wit, which was their precedent, great natural gifts, improved by study: Beaumont especially being so accurate a judge of plays, that Ben Johnson, while he lived, submitted all his writings to his censure, and,

'tis thought, used his judgment in correcting, if not contriving, all his plots. What value he had for him, appears by the verses he writ to him; and therefore I need speak no farther of it. The first play that brought Fletcher and him in esteem was their *Philaster*: for before that, they had written two or three very unsuccessfully, as the like is reported of Ben Johnson, before he writ *Every Man in his Humour*. Their plots were generally more regular than Shakspeare's, especially those which were made before Beaumont's death; and they understood and imitated the conversation of gentlemen much better; whose wild debaucheries, and quickness of wit in reparties, no poet before them could paint as they have done. Humour, which Ben Johnson derived from particular persons, they made it not their business to describe: they represented all the passions very lively, but above all, love. I am apt to believe the English language in them arrived to its highest perfection: what words have since been taken in, are rather superfluous than ornamental. Their plays are now the most pleasant and frequent entertainments of the stage; two of theirs being acted through the year for one of Shakspeare's or Johnson's: the reason is, because there is a certain gaiety in their comedies, and pathos in their more serious plays, which suit generally with all men's humours. Shakspeare's language is likewise a little obsolete, and Ben Johnson's wit comes short of theirs.

"As for Johnson, to whose character I am now

arrived, if we look upon him while he was himself, (for his last plays were but his dotages) I think him the most learned and judicious writer which any theatre ever had. He was a most severe judge of himself, as well as others. One cannot say he wanted wit, but rather that he was frugal of it. In his works you find little to retrench or alter. Wit, and language, and humour also in some measure, we had before him; but something of art was wanting to the drama, till he came. He managed his strength to more advantage than any who preceded him. You seldom find him making love in any of his scenes, or endeavouring to move the passions; his genius was too sullen and saturnine to do it gracefully, especially when he knew he came after those who had performed both to such an height. Humour was his proper sphere; and in that he delighted most to represent mechanick people. He was deeply conversant in the ancients, both Greek and Latin, and he borrowed boldly from them: there is scarce a poet or historian among the Roman authors of those times whom he has not translated in *Sejanus* and *Catiline*. But he has done his robberies so openly, that one may see he fears not to be taxed by any law. He invades authors like a monarch; and what would be theft in other poets, is only victory in him. With the spoils of these writers he so represents old Rome to us, in its rites, ceremonies, and customs, that if one of their poets had written either of his tragedies, we had seen less of it than in him. If there was any fault in

his language, 'twas that he weaved it too closely and laboriously, in his comedies especially: perhaps too, he did a little too much Romanize our tongue, leaving the words which he translated almost as much Latin as he found them: wherein, though he learnedly followed their language, he did not enough comply with the idiom of ours. If I would compare him with Shakspeare, I must acknowledge him the more correct poet, but Shakspeare the greater wit. Shakspeare was the Homer, or father of our dramatick poets; Johnson was the Virgil, the pattern of elaborate writing; I admire him, but I love Shakspeare. To conclude of him; as he has given us the most correct plays, so in the precepts which he has laid down in his *Discoveries*, we have as many and profitable rules for perfecting the stage, as any wherewith the French can furnish us.

"Having thus spoken of the author, I proceed to the examination of his comedy, *The Silent Woman*.

EXAMEN OF THE SILENT WOMAN

"To begin first with the length of the action; it is so far from exceeding the compass of a natural day, that it takes not up an artificial one. 'Tis all included in the limits of three hours and a half, which is no more than is required for the presentment on the stage: a beauty perhaps not much observed; if it had, we should not have looked on the Spanish

translation of *Five Hours* with so much wonder. The scene of it is laid in London; the latitude of place is almost as little as you can imagine; for it lies all within the compass of two houses, and after the first act, in one. The continuity of scenes is observed more than in any of our plays, except his own *Fox* and *Alchemist*. They are not broken above twice or thrice at most in the whole comedy; and in the two best of Corneille's plays, the *Cid* and *Cinna*, they are interrupted once. The action of the play is entirely one; the end or aim of which is the settling Morose's estate on Dauphine. The intrigue of it is the greatest and most noble of any pure unmixed comedy in any language; you see in it many persons of various characters and humours, and all delightful. As first, Morose, or an old man, to whom all noise but his own talking is offensive. Some who would be thought criticks, say this humour of his is forced: but to remove that objection, we may consider him first to be naturally of a delicate hearing, as many are, to whom all sharp sounds are unpleasant; and secondly, we may attribute much of it to the peevishness of his age, or the wayward authority of an old man in his own house, where he may make himself obeyed; and to this the poet seems to allude in his name Morose. Besides this, I am assured from divers persons, that Ben Johnson was actually acquainted with such a man, one altogether as ridiculous as he is here represented. Others say, it is not enough to find one man of such an humour; it must be common

to more, and the more common the more natural. To prove this, they instance in the best of comical characters, Falstaff. There are many men resembling him; old, fat, merry, cowardly, drunken, amorous, vain, and lying. But to convince these people, I need but tell them, that humour is the ridiculous extravagance of conversation, wherein one man differs from all others. If then it be common, or communicated to many, how differs it from other men's? or what indeed causes it to be ridiculous so much as the singularity of it? As for Falstaff, he is not properly one humour, but a miscellany of humours or images, drawn from so many several men: that wherein he is singular is his wit, or those things he says *præter expectatum*, unexpected by the audience; his quick evasions, when you imagine him surprised, which, as they are extremely diverting of themselves, so receive a great addition from his person; for the very sight of such an unwieldy old debauched fellow is a comedy alone. And here, having a place so proper for it, I cannot but enlarge somewhat upon this subject of humour into which I am fallen. The ancients had little of it in their comedies; for the τὸ γελοῖον of the old comedy, of which Aristophanes was chief, was not so much to imitate a man, as to make the people laugh at some odd conceit, which had commonly somewhat of unnatural or obscene in it. Thus, when you see Socrates brought upon the stage, you are not to imagine him made ridiculous by the imitation of his actions, but rather by making

him perform something very unlike himself; something so childish and absurd, as by comparing it with the gravity of the true Socrates, makes a ridiculous object for the spectators. In their new comedy which succeeded, the poets sought indeed to express the ἦθος, as in their tragedies the πάθος of mankind. But this ἦθος contained only the general characters of men and manners; as old men, lovers, serving-men, courtezans, parasites, and such other persons as we see in their comedies; all which they made alike: that is, one old man or father, one lover, one courtezan, so like another, as if the first of them had begot the rest of every sort: *Ex homine hunc natum dicas.* The same custom they observed likewise in their tragedies. As for the French, though they have the word *humeur* among them, yet they have small use of it in their comedies or farces; they being but ill imitations of the *ridiculum*, or that which stirred up laughter in the old comedy. But among the English 'tis otherwise: where by humour is meant some extravagant habit, passion, or affection, particular (as I said before) to some one person, by the oddness of which, he is immediately distinguished from the rest of men; which being lively and naturally represented, most frequently begets that malicious pleasure in the audience which is testified by laughter; as all things which are deviations from customs are ever the aptest to produce it: though by the way this laughter is only accidental, as the person represented is fantastick or bizarre; but pleasure is essential to it, as the imita-

tion of what is natural. The description of these humours, drawn from the knowledge and observation of particular persons, was the peculiar genius and talent of Ben Johnson; to whose play I now return.

"Besides Morose, there are at least nine or ten different characters and humours in *The Silent Woman*; all which persons have several concernments of their own, yet are all used by the poet, to the conducting of the main design to perfection. I shall not waste time in commending the writing of this play; but I will give you my opinion, that there is more wit and acuteness of fancy in it than in any of Ben Johnson's. Besides that he has here described the conversation of gentlemen in the persons of True-Wit, and his friends, with more gaiety, air, and freedom, than in the rest of his comedies. For the contrivance of the plot, 'tis extreme elaborate, and yet withal easy; for the λύσις, or untying of it, 'tis so admirable, that when it is done, no one of the audience would think the poet could have missed it; and yet it was concealed so much before the last scene, that any other way would sooner have entered into your thoughts. But I dare not take upon me to commend the fabrick of it, because it is altogether so full of art, that I must unravel every scene in it to commend it as I ought. And this excellent contrivance is still the more to be admired, because 'tis comedy, where the persons are only of common rank, and their business private, not elevated by passions or high concernments, as in

serious plays. Here every one is a proper judge of all he sees, nothing is represented but that with which he daily converses: so that by consequence all faults lie open to discovery, and few are pardonable. 'Tis this which Horace has judiciously observed:

Creditur, ex medio quia res arcessit, habere
Sudoris minimum; sed habet Comedia tanto
Plus oneris, quanto veniæ minus.

But our poet who was not ignorant of these difficulties, has made use of all advantages; as he who designs a large leap takes his rise from the highest ground. One of these advantages is that which Corneille has laid down as the greatest which can arrive to any poem, and which he himself could never compass above thrice in all his plays; viz. the making choice of some signal and long-expected day, whereon the action of the play is to depend. This day was that designed by Dauphine for the settling of his uncle's estate upon him; which to compass, he contrives to marry him. That the marriage had been plotted by him long beforehand, is made evident by what he tells True-wit in the second act, that in one moment he had destroyed what he had been raising many months.

"There is another artifice of the poet, which I cannot here omit, because by the frequent practice of it in his comedies he has left it to us almost as a rule; that is, when he has any character or humour

wherein he would show a *coup de Maistre*, or his highest skill, he recommends it to your observation by a pleasant description of it before the person first appears. Thus, in *Bartholomew-Fair* he gives you the pictures of Numps and Cokes, and in this those of Daw, Lafoole, Morose, and the Collegiate Ladies; all which your hear described before you see them. So that before they come upon the stage, you have a longing expectation of them, which prepares you to receive them favourably; and when they are there, even from their first appearance you are so far acquainted with them, that nothing of their humour is lost to you.

"I will observe yet one thing further of this admirable plot; the business of it rises in every act. The second is greater than the first; the third than the second; and so forward to the fifth. There too you see, till the very last scene, new difficulties arising to obstruct the action of the play; and when the audience is brought into despair that the business can naturally be effected, then, and not before, the discovery is made. But that the poet might entertain you with more variety all this while, he reserves some new characters to shew you, which he opens not till the second and third act; in the second Morose, Daw, the Barber, and Otter; in the third the Collegiate Ladies: all which he moves afterwards in by-walks, or under-plots, as diversions to the main design, lest it should grow tedious, though they are still naturally joined with it, and somewhere or other subservient to

it. Thus, like a skilful chess-player, by little and little he draws out his men, and makes his pawns of use to his greater persons.

"If this comedy and some others of his, were translated into French prose, (which would now be no wonder to them, since Molière has lately given them plays out of verse, which have not displeased them,) I believe the controversy would soon be decided betwixt the two nations, even making them the judges. But we need not call our heroes to our aid. Be it spoken to the honour of the English, our nation can never want in any age such who are able to dispute the empire of wit with any people in the universe. And though the fury of a civil war, and power for twenty years together abandoned to a barbarous race of men, enemies of all good learning, had buried the muses under the ruins of monarchy; yet, with the restoration of our happiness, we see revived poesy lifting up its head, and already shaking off the rubbish which lay so heavy on it. We have seen since his majesty's return, many dramatick poems which yield not to those of any foreign nation, and which deserve all laurels but the English. I will set aside flattery and envy: it cannot be denied but we have had some little blemish either in the plot or writing of all those plays which have been made within these seven years; (and perhaps there is no nation in the world so quick to discern them, or so difficult to pardon them, as ours:) yet if we can persuade ourselves to use the

candour of that poet, who, though the most severe of criticks, has left us this caution by which to moderate our censures—

——ubi plura nitent in carmine, non ego paucis
Offendar maculis ;—

if, in consideration of their many and great beauties, we can wink at some slight and little imperfections, if we, I say, can be thus equal to ourselves, I ask no favour from the French. And if I do not venture upon any particular judgment of our late plays, 'tis out of the consideration which an ancient writer gives me: *vivorum, ut magna admiratio, ita censura difficilis:* betwixt the extremes of admiration and malice, 'tis hard to judge uprightly of the living. Only I think it may be permitted me to say, that as it is no lessening to us to yield to some plays, and those not many, of our own nation in the last age, so can it be no addition to pronounce of our present poets, that they have far surpassed all the ancients, and the modern writers of other countries."

This was the substance of what was then spoke on that occasion; and Lisideius, I think, was going to reply, when he was prevented thus by Crites: "I am confident," said he, "that the most material things that can be said have been already urged on either side; if they have not, I must beg of Lisideius that he will defer his answer till another time: for I confess I have a joint quarrel to you both, because you

have concluded, without any reason given for it, that rhyme is proper for the stage. I will not dispute how ancient it hath been among us to write this way; perhaps our ancestors knew no better till Shakspeare's time. I will grant it was not altogether left by him, and that Fletcher and Ben Johnson used it frequently in their Pastorals, and sometimes in other plays. Farther,—I will not argue whether we received it originally from our own countrymen, or from the French; for that is an inquiry of as little benefit, as theirs who, in the midst of the great plague, were not so solicitous to provide against it, as to know whether we had it from the malignity of our own air, or by transportation from Holland. I have therefore only to affirm, that it is not allowable in serious plays; for comedies, I find you already concluding with me. To prove this, I might satisfy myself to tell you, how much in vain it is for you to strive against the stream of the people's inclination; the greatest part of which are prepossessed so much with those excellent plays of Shakspeare, Fletcher, and Ben Johnson, which have been written out of rhyme, that except you could bring them such as were written better in it, and those too by persons of equal reputation with them, it will be impossible for you to gain your cause with them, who will still be judges. This it is to which, in fine, all your reasons must submit. The unanimous consent of an audience is so powerful, that even Julius Cæsar (as Macrobius reports of him,) when he was perpetual

dictator, was not able to balance it on the other side; but when Laberius, a Roman Knight, at his request contended in the *Mime* with another poet, he was forced to cry out, *Etiam favente me victus es, Laberi.* But I will not on this occasion take the advantage of the greater number, but only urge such reasons against rhyme, as I find in the writings of those who have argued for the other way. First then, I am of opinion, that rhyme is unnatural in a play, because dialogue there is presented as the effect of sudden thought: for a play is the imitation of nature; and since no man, without premeditation, speaks in rhyme, neither ought he to do it on the stage. This hinders not but the fancy may be there elevated to an higher pitch of thought than it is in ordinary discourse; for there is a probability that men of excellent and quick parts may speak noble things *extempore*: but those thoughts are never fettered with the numbers or sound of verse without study, and therefore it cannot be but unnatural to present the most free way of speaking in that which is the most constrained. For this reason, says Aristotle, 'tis best to write tragedy in that kind of verse which is the least such, or which is nearest prose: and this amongst the ancients was the Iambick, and with us is blank verse, or the measure of verse kept exactly without rhyme. These numbers therefore are fittest for a play; the others for a paper of verses, or a poem; blank verse being as much below them, as rhyme is improper for the drama. And if it be objected that neither are blank verses made *extempore*,

yet, as nearest nature, they are still to be preferred. —But there are two particular exceptions, which many besides myself have had to verse; by which it will appear yet more plainly how improper it is in plays. And the first of them is grounded on that very reason for which some have commended rhyme; they say, the quickness of repartees in argumentative scenes receives an ornament from verse. Now what is more unreasonable than to imagine that a man should not only light upon the wit, but the rhyme too, upon the sudden? This nicking of him who spoke before both in sound and measure, is so great an happiness, that you must at least suppose the persons of your play to be born poets: *Arcades omnes, et cantare pares, et respondere parati*: they must have arrived to the degree of *quicquid conabar dicere*;—to make verses almost whether they will or no. If they are any thing below this, it will look rather like the design of two, than the answer of one: it will appear that your actors hold intelligence together; that they perform their tricks like fortune-tellers, by confederacy. The hand of art will be too visible in it, against that maxim of all professions—*Ars est celare artem*; that it is the greatest perfection of art to keep itself undiscovered. Nor will it serve you to object, that however you manage it, 'tis still known to be a play; and, consequently, the dialogue of two persons understood to be the labour of one poet. For a play is still an imitation of nature; we know we are to be deceived, and we desire to be so; but no man ever was deceived

but with a probability of truth; for who will suffer a gross lie to be fastened on him? Thus we sufficiently understand, that the scenes which represent cities and countries to us are not really such, but only painted on boards and canvas; but shall that excuse the ill painture or designment of them? Nay, rather ought they not be laboured with so much the more diligence and exactness, to help the imagination? since the mind of man does naturally tend to truth; and therefore the nearer any thing comes to the imitation of it, the more it pleases.

"Thus, you see, your rhyme is uncapable of expressing the greatest thoughts naturally, and the lowest it cannot with any grace: for what is more unbefitting the majesty of verse, than to call a servant, or bid a door be shut in rhyme? and yet you are often forced on this miserable necessity. But verse, you say, circumscribes a quick and luxuriant fancy, which would extend itself too far on every subject, did not the labour which is required to well-turned and polished rhyme, set bounds to it. Yet this argument, if granted, would only prove that we may write better in verse, but not more naturally. Neither is it able to evince that; for he who wants judgment to confine his fancy in blank verse, may want it as much in rhyme: and he who has it will avoid errors in both kinds. Latin verse was as great a confinement to the imagination of those poets, as rhyme to ours; and yet you find Ovid saying too much on every subject. *Nescivit* (says Seneca) *quod*

bene cessit relinquere: of which he gives you one famous instance in his description of the deluge:

> *Omnia pontus erat, deerant quoque litora ponto.*
> Now all was sea, nor had that sea a shore.

Thus Ovid's fancy was not limited by verse, and Virgil needed not verse to have bounded his.

"In our own language we see Ben Johnson confining himself to what ought to be said, even in the liberty of blank verse; and yet Corneille, the most judicious of the French poets, is still varying the same sense an hundred ways, and dwelling eternally on the same subject, though confined by rhyme. Some other exceptions I have to verse; but since these I have named are for the most part already publick, I conceive it reasonable they should first be answered."

"It concerns me less than any," said Neander, (seeing he had ended,) "to reply to this discourse; because when I should have proved that verse may be natural in plays, yet I should always be ready to confess, that those which I have written in this kind come short of that perfection which is required. Yet since you are pleased I should undertake this province, I will do it, though with all imaginable respect and deference, both to that person from whom you have borrowed your strongest arguments, and to whose judgment, when I have said all, I finally submit. But before I proceed to answer your ob-

jections, I must first remember you, that I exclude all comedy from my defence; and next that I deny not but blank verse may be also used; and content myself only to assert, that in serious plays where the subject and characters are great, and the plot unmixed with mirth, which might allay or divert these concernments which are produced, rhyme is there as natural and more effectual than blank verse.

"And now having laid down this as a foundation, —to begin with Crites,—I must crave leave to tell him, that some of his arguments against rhyme reach no farther than, from the faults or defects of ill rhyme, to conclude against the use of it in general. May not I conclude against blank verse by the same reason? If the words of some poets who write in it, are either ill chosen, or ill placed, which makes not only rhyme, but all kind of verse in any language unnatural, shall I, for their vicious affectation, condemn those excellent lines of Fletcher, which are written in that kind? Is there any thing in rhyme more constrained than this line in blank verse?—*I heaven invoke, and strong resistance make*; where you see both the clauses are placed unnaturally, that is, contrary to the common way of speaking, and that without the excuse of a rhyme to cause it: yet you would think me very ridiculous, if I should accuse the stubbornness of blank verse for this, and not rather the stiffness of the poet. Therefore, Crites, you must either prove that words, though well chosen, and duly placed, yet

render not rhyme natural in itself; or that, however natural and easy the rhyme may be, yet it is not proper for a play. If you insist on the former part, I would ask you, what other conditions are required to make rhyme natural in itself, besides an election of apt words, and a right disposition of them? For the due choice of your words expresses your sense naturally, and the due placing them adapts the rhyme to it. If you object that one verse may be made for the sake of another, though both the words and rhyme be apt, I answer, it cannot possibly so fall out; for either there is a dependance of sense betwixt the first line and the second, or there is none: if there be that connection, then in the natural position of the words the latter line must of necessity flow from the former; if there be no dependance, yet still the due ordering of words makes the last line as natural in itself as the other: so that the necessity of a rhyme never forces any but bad or lazy writers to say what they would not otherwise. 'Tis true, there is both care and art required to write in verse. A good poet never establishes the first line, till he has sought out such a rhyme as may fit the sense, already prepared to heighten the second: many times the close of the sense falls into the middle of the next verse, or farther off, and he may often prevail himself of the same advantages in English which Virgil had in Latin,—he may break off in the hemystich, and begin another line. Indeed, the not observing these two last things, makes plays which are writ in verse, so tedious: for

though, most commonly, the sense is to be confined to the couplet, yet nothing that does *perpetuo tenore fluere*, run in the same channel, can please always. 'Tis like the murmuring of a stream, which not varying in the fall, causes at first attention, at last drowsiness. Variety of cadences is the best rule; the greatest help to the actors, and refreshment to the audience.

"If then verse may be made natural in itself, how becomes it unnatural in a play? You say the stage is the representation of nature, and no man in ordinary conversation speaks in rhyme. But you foresaw when you said this, that it might be answered—neither does any man speak in blank verse, or in measure without rhyme. Therefore you concluded, that which is nearest nature is still to be preferred. But you took no notice that rhyme might be made as natural as blank verse, by the well placing of the words, &c. All the difference between them, when they are both correct, is, the sound in one, which the other wants; and if so, the sweetness of it, and all the advantage resulting from it, which are handled in the Preface to *The Rival Ladies*, will yet stand good. As for that place of Aristotle, where he says, plays should be writ in that kind of verse which is nearest prose, it makes little for you; blank verse being properly but measured prose. Now measure alone, in any modern language, does not constitute verse; those of the ancients in Greek and Latin consisted in quantity of words, and a determinate number of feet. But when,

by the inundation of the Goths and Vandals into Italy, new languages were introduced, and barbarously mingled with the Latin, of which the Italian, Spanish, French, and ours, (made out of them and the Teutonick,) are dialects, a new way of poesy was practised; new, I say, in those countries, for in all probability it was that of the conquerors in their own nations: at least we are able to prove, that the eastern people have used it from all antiquity. This new way consisted in measure or number of feet, and rhyme; the sweetness of rhyme, and observation of accent, supplying the place of quantity in words, which could neither exactly be observed by those barbarians, who knew not the rules of it, neither was it suitable to their tongues, as it had been to the Greek and Latin. No man is tied in modern poesy to observe any farther rule in the feet of his verse, but that they be dissyllables; whether Spondee, Trochee, or Iambick, it matters not; only he is obliged to rhyme: neither do the Spanish, French, Italian, or Germans, acknowledge at all, or very rarely, any such kind of poesy as blank verse amongst them. Therefore, at most 'tis but a poetick prose, a *sermo pedestris*; and as such, most fit for comedies, where I acknowledge rhyme to be improper.—Farther; as to that quotation of Aristotle, our couplet verses may be rendered as near prose as blank verse itself, by using those advantages I lately named,—as breaks in an hemistich, or running the sense into another line,—thereby making art and order appear as loose and free

as nature: or not tying ourselves to couplets strictly, we may use the benefit of the Pindarick way practised in *The Siege of Rhodes*; where the numbers vary, and the rhyme is disposed carelessly, and far from often chyming. Neither is that other advantage of the ancients to be despised, of changing the kind of verse when they please, with the change of the scene, or some new entrance; for they confine not themselves always to iambicks, but extend their liberty to all lyrick numbers, and sometimes even to hexameter. But I need not go so far to prove that rhyme, as it succeeds to all other offices of Greek and Latin verse, so especially to this of plays, since the custom of nations at this day confirms it; the French, Italian, and Spanish tragedies are generally writ in it; and sure the universal consent of the most civilized parts of the world, ought in this, as it doth in other customs, to include the rest.

"But perhaps you may tell me, I have proposed such a way to make rhyme natural, and consequently proper to plays, as is unpracticable; and that I shall scarce find six or eight lines together in any play, where the words are so placed and chosen as is required to make it natural. I answer, no poet need constrain himself at all times to it. It is enough he makes it his general rule; for I deny not but sometimes there may be a greatness in placing the words otherwise; and sometimes they may sound better; sometimes also the variety itself is excuse enough. But if, for the most part, the words be placed as they

are in the negligence of prose, it is sufficient to denominate the way practicable; for we esteem that to be such, which in the trial oftner succeeds than misses. And thus far you may find the practice made good in many plays: where you do not, remember still, that if you cannot find six natural rhymes together, it will be as hard for you to produce as many lines in blank verse, even among the greatest of our poets, against which I cannot make some reasonable exception.

"And this, Sir, calls to my remembrance the beginning of your discourse, where you told us we should never find the audience favourable to this kind of writing, till we could produce as good plays in rhyme, as Ben Johnson, Fletcher, and Shakspeare, had writ out of it. But it is to raise envy to the living, to compare them with the dead. They are honoured, and almost adored by us, as they deserve; neither do I know any so presumptuous of themselves as to contend with them. Yet give me leave to say thus much, without injury to their ashes; that not only we shall never equal them, but they could never equal themselves, were they to rise and write again. We acknowledge them our fathers in wit; but they have ruined their estates themselves, before they came to their children's hands. There is scarce an humour, a character, or any kind of plot, which they have not used. All comes sullied or wasted to us: and were they to entertain this age, they could not now make so plenteous treatments out of such decayed for-

tunes. This therefore will be a good argument to us, either not to write at all, or to attempt some other way. There is no bays to be expected in their walks: *tentanda via est, quâ me quoque possim tollere humo.*

"This way of writing in verse they have only left free to us; our age is arrived to a perfection in it, which they never knew; and which (if we may guess by what of theirs we have seen in verse, as *The Faithful Shepherdess*, and *Sad Shepherd*) 'tis probable they never could have reached. For the genius of every age is different; and though ours excel in this, I deny not but to imitate nature in that perfection which they did in prose, is a greater commendation than to write in verse exactly. As for what you have added—that the people are not generally inclined to like this way, —if it were true, it would be no wonder, that betwixt the shaking off an old habit, and the introducing of a new, there should be difficulty. Do we not see them stick to Hopkins' and Sternhold's psalms, and forsake those of David, I mean Sandys his translation of them? If by the people you understand the multitude, the οἱ πολλοί, 'tis no matter what they think; they are sometimes in the right, sometimes in the wrong: their judgment is a mere lottery. *Est ubi plebs rectè putat, est ubi peccat.* Horace says it of the vulgar, judging poesy. But if you mean the mixed audience of the populace and the noblesse, I dare confidently affirm that a great part of the latter sort are already favourable to verse; and that no serious plays written

since the king's return have been more kindly received by them, than *The Siege of Rhodes*, the *Mustapha*, *The Indian Queen*, and *Indian Emperor*.

"But I come now to the inference of your first argument. You said that the dialogue of plays is presented as the effect of sudden thought, but no man speaks suddenly, or *extempore*, in rhyme; and you inferred from thence, that rhyme, which you acknowledge to be proper to epick poesy, cannot equally be proper to dramatick, unless we could suppose all men born so much more than poets, that verses should be made in them, not by them.

"It has been formerly urged by you, and confessed by me, that since no man spoke any kind of verse *extempore*, that which was nearest nature was to be preferred. I answer you, therefore, by distinguishing betwixt what is nearest to the nature of comedy, which is the imitation of common persons and ordinary speaking, and what is nearest the nature of a serious play: this last is indeed the representation of nature, but 'tis nature wrought up to a higher pitch. The plot, the characters, the wit, the passions, the descriptions, are all exalted above the level of common converse, as high as the imagination of the poet can carry them, with proportion to verisimility. Tragedy, we know, is wont to image to us the minds and fortunes of noble persons, and to portray these exactly; heroick rhyme is nearest nature, as being the noblest kind of modern verse.

Indignatur enim privatis et prope socco
Dignis carminibus narrari cœna Thyestæ—

says Horace: and in another place,

Effutire leves indigna tragœdia versus—.

Blank verse is acknowledged to be too low for a poem, nay more, for a paper of verses; but if too low for an ordinary sonnet, how much more for tragedy, which is by Aristotle, in the dispute betwixt the epick poesy and the dramatick, for many reasons he there alledges, ranked above it?

"But setting this defence aside, your argument is almost as strong against the use of rhyme in poems as in plays; for the epick way is every where interlaced with dialogue, or discoursive scenes; and therefore you must either grant rhyme to be improper there, which is contrary to your assertion, or admit it into plays by the same title which you have given it to poems. For though tragedy be justly preferred above the other, yet there is a great affinity between them, as may easily be discovered in that definition of a play which Lisideius gave us. The *genus* of them is the same,—a just and lively image of human nature, in its actions, passions, and traverses of fortune: so is the end,—namely, for the delight and benefit of mankind. The characters and persons are still the same, viz. the greatest of both sorts; only the manner of acquainting us with those actions, passions, and fortunes, is different. Tragedy

performs it *viva voce*, or by action, in dialogue; wherein it excels the epick poem, which does it chiefly by narration, and therefore is not so lively an image of human nature. However, the agreement betwixt them is such, that if rhyme be proper for one, it must be for the other. Verse, 'tis true, is not the effect of sudden thought; but this hinders not that sudden thought may be represented in verse, since those thoughts are such as must be higher than nature can raise them without premeditation, especially to a continuance of them, even out of verse; and consequently you cannot imagine them to have been sudden either in the poet or in the actors. A play, as I have said, to be like nature, is to be set above it; as statues which are placed on high are made greater than the life, that they may descend to the sight in their just proportion.

"Perhaps I have insisted too long on this objection; but the clearing of it will make my stay shorter on the rest. You tell us, Crites, that rhyme appears most unnatural in repartees, or short replies: when he who answers, (it being presumed he knew not what the other would say, yet) makes up that part of the verse which was left incomplete, and supplies both the sound and measure of it. This, you say, looks rather like the confederacy of two, than the answer of one.

"This, I confess, is an objection which is in every man's mouth, who loves not rhyme: but suppose, I beseech you, the repartee were made only in blank

verse, might not part of the same argument be turned against you? for the measure is as often supplied there, as it is in rhyme; the latter half of the hemistich as commonly made up, or a second line subjoined as a reply to the former; which any one leaf in Johnson's plays will sufficiently clear to you. You will often find in the Greek tragedians, and in Seneca, that when a scene grows up into the warmth of repartees, which is the close fighting of it, the latter part of the trimeter is supplied by him who answers; and yet it was never observed as a fault in them by any of the ancient or modern criticks. The case is the same in our verse, as it was in theirs; rhyme to us being in lieu of quantity to them. But if no latitude is to be allowed a poet, you take from him not only his licence of *quidlibet audendi*, but you tie him up in a straiter compass than you would a philosopher. This is indeed *Musas colere severiores*. You would have him follow nature, but he must follow her on foot: you have dismounted him from his Pegasus. But you tell us, this supplying the last half of a verse, or adjoining a whole second to the former, looks more like the design of two, than the answer of one. Suppose we acknowledge it: how comes this confederacy to be more displeasing to you, than in a dance which is well contrived? You see there the united design of many persons to make up one figure: after they have separated themselves in many petty divisions, they rejoin one by one into a gross: the confederacy

is plain amongst them, for chance could never produce any thing so beautiful; and yet there is nothing in it, that shocks your sight. I acknowledge the hand of art appears in repartee, as of necessity it must in all kind of verse. But there is also the quick and poynant brevity of it (which is an high imitation of nature in those sudden gusts of passion) to mingle with it; and this, joined with the cadency and sweetness of the rhyme, leaves nothing in the soul of the hearer to desire. 'Tis an art which appears; but it appears only like the shadowings of painture, which being to cause the rounding of it, cannot be absent; but while that is considered, they are lost: so while we attend to the other beauties of the matter, the care and labour of the rhyme is carried from us, or at least drowned in its own sweetness, as bees are sometimes buried in their honey. When a poet has found the repartee, the last perfection he can add to it, is to put it into verse. However good the thought may be, however apt the words in which 'tis couched, yet he finds himself at a little unrest, while rhyme is wanting: he cannot leave it till that comes naturally, and then is at ease, and sits down contented.

"From replies, which are the most elevated thoughts of verse, you pass to those which are most mean, and which are common with the lowest of household conversation. In these, you say, the majesty of verse suffers. You instance in the calling of a servant, or commanding a door to be shut, in rhyme. This, Crites, is a good observation of your's, but no argu-

ment: for it proves no more but that such thoughts should be waved, as often as may be, by the address of the poet. But suppose they are necessary in the places where he uses them, yet there is no need to put them into rhyme. He may place them in the beginning of a verse, and break it off, as unfit, when so debased, for any other use; or granting the worst, —that they require more room than the hemistich will allow, yet still there is a choice to be made of the best words, and least vulgar, (provided they be apt,) to express such thoughts. Many have blamed rhyme in general, for this fault, when the poet with a little care might have redressed it. But they do it with no more justice, than if English poesy should be made ridiculous for the sake of the Water-poet's rhymes. Our language is noble, full, and significant; and I know not why he who is master of it may not clothe ordinary things in it as decently as the Latin, if he use the same diligence in his choice of words: *delectus verborum origo est eloquentiæ.* It was the saying of Julius Cæsar, one so curious in his, that none of them can be changed but for a worse. One would think, *unlock the door*, was a thing as vulgar as could be spoken; and yet Seneca could make it sound high and lofty in his Latin:

Reserate clusos regii postes laris.
Set wide the palace gates.

"But I turn from this exception, both because it happens not above twice or thrice in any play that

those vulgar thoughts are used; and then too, (were there no other apology to be made, yet,) the necessity of them, which is alike in all kind of writing, may excuse them. For if they are little and mean in rhyme, they are of consequence such in blank verse. Besides that the great eagerness and precipitation with which they are spoken, makes us rather mind the substance than the dress; that for which they are spoken, rather than what is spoke. For they are always the effect of some hasty concernment, and something of consequence depends on them.

"Thus, Crites, I have endeavoured to answer your objections; it remains only that I should vindicate an argument for verse, which you have gone about to overthrow. It had formerly been said, that the easiness of blank verse renders the poet too luxuriant, but that the labour of rhyme bounds and circumscribes an over-fruitful fancy; the sense there being commonly confined to the couplet, and the words so ordered that the rhyme naturally follows them, not they the rhyme. To this you answered, that it was no argument to the question in hand; for the dispute was not which way a man may write best, but which is most proper for the subject on which he writes.

"First, give me leave, Sir, to remember you, that the argument against which you raised this objection, was only secondary: it was built on this hypothesis, —that to write in verse was proper for serious plays. Which supposition being granted, (as it was briefly made out in that discourse, by shewing how verse

might be made natural,) it asserted, that this way of writing was an help to the poet's judgment, by putting bounds to a wild overflowing fancy. I think, therefore, it will not be hard for me to make good what it was to prove on that supposition. But you add, that were this let pass, yet he who wants judgment in the liberty of his fancy, may as well shew the defect of it when he is confined to verse; for he who has judgment will avoid errors, and he who has it not, will commit them in all kinds of writing.

"This argument, as you have taken it from a most acute person, so I confess it carries much weight in it: but by using the word judgment here indefinitely, you seem to have put a fallacy upon us. I grant, he who has judgment, that is, so profound, so strong, or rather so infallible a judgment, that he needs no helps to keep it always poised and upright, will commit no faults either in rhyme or out of it. And on the other extreme, he who has a judgment so weak and crazed that no helps can correct or amend it, shall write scurvily out of rhyme, and worse in it. But the first of these judgments is no where to be found, and the latter is not fit to write at all. To speak therefore of judgment as it is in the best poets; they who have the greatest proportion of it, want other helps than from it, within. As for example, you would be loth to say, that he who is endued with a sound judgment has no need of history, geography, or moral philosophy, to write correctly. Judgment is indeed the master-workman in a play;

but he requires many subordinate hands, many tools to his assistance. And verse I affirm to be one of these; 'tis a rule and line by which he keeps his building compact and even, which otherwise lawless imagination would raise either irregularly or loosely; at least, if the poet commits errors with this help, he would make greater and more without it:—'tis, in short, a slow and painful, but the surest kind of working. Ovid, whom you accuse for luxuriancy in verse, had perhaps been farther guilty of it, had he writ in prose. And for your instance of Ben Johnson, who, you say, writ exactly without the help of rhyme; you are to remember, 'tis only an aid to a luxuriant fancy, which his was not: as he did not want imagination, so none ever said he had much to spare. Neither was verse then refined so much, to be an help to that age, as it is to ours. Thus then the second thoughts being usually the best, as receiving the maturest digestion from judgment, and the last and most mature product of those thoughts being artful and laboured verse, it may well be inferred, that verse is a great help to a luxuriant fancy; and this is what that argument which you opposed was to evince."

Neander was pursuing this discourse so eagerly, that Eugenius had called to him twice or thrice, ere he took notice that the barge stood still, and that they were at the foot of Somerset-stairs, where they had appointed it to land. The company were all sorry to separate so soon, though a great part of the evening

was already spent; and stood a-while looking back on the water, upon which the moon-beams played, and made it appear like floating quicksilver: at last they went up through a crowd of French people, who were merrily dancing in the open air, and nothing concerned for the noise of guns which had alarmed the town that afternoon. Walking thence together to the Piazze, they parted there; Eugenius and Lisideius to some pleasant appointment they had made, and Crites and Neander to their several lodgings.

A DEFENCE

OF AN ESSAY

OF DRAMATIC POESY

THE former edition of *The Indian Emperor* being full of faults, which had escaped the printer, I have been willing to overlook this second with more care; and though I could not allow myself so much time as was necessary, yet, by that little I have done, the press is freed from some gross errors which it had to answer for before. As for the more material faults of writing, which are properly mine, though I see many of them, I want leisure to amend them. 'Tis enough for those who make one poem the business of their lives, to leave that correct: yet, excepting Virgil, I never met with any which was so in any language.

But while I was thus employed about this impression, there came to my hands a new printed play, called, *The Great Favourite, or The Duke of Lerma*; the author of which, a noble and most ingenious person, has done me the favour to make some observations and animadversions upon my *Dramatique Essay*. I must confess he might have better consulted his reputation, than by matching himself with so weak

an adversary. But if his honour be diminished in the choice of his antagonist, it is sufficiently recompensed in the election of his cause: which being the weaker, in all appearance, as combating the received opinions of the best ancient and modern authors, will add to his glory, if he overcome, and to the opinion of his generosity, if he be vanquished: since he ingages at so great odds, and, so like a cavalier, undertakes the protection of the weaker party. I have only to fear on my own behalf, that so good a cause as mine may not suffer by my ill management, or weak defence; yet I cannot in honour but take the glove, when 'tis offered me: though I am only a champion by succession; and no more able to defend the right of Aristotle and Horace, than an infant Dimock to maintain the title of a King.

For my own concernment in the controversie, it is so small, that I can easily be contented to be driven from a few notions of Dramatique Poesie; especially by one, who has the reputation of understanding all things: and I might justly make that excuse for my yielding to him, which the Philosopher made to the Emperor,—*why should I offer to contend with him, who is master of more than twenty legions of arts and sciences?* But I am forced to fight, and therefore it will be no shame to be overcome.

Yet I am so much his servant, as not to meddle with any thing which does not concern me in his Preface; therefore, I leave the good sense and other excellencies of the first twenty lines to be considered

by the critiques. As for the play of *The Duke of Lerma*, having so much altered and beautified it, as he has done, it can justly belong to none but him. Indeed, they must be extream ignorant as well as envious, who would rob him of that honour; for you see him putting in his claim to it, even in the first two lines:

> Repulse upon repulse, like waves thrown back,
> That slide to hang upon obdurate rocks.

After this, let detraction do its worst; for if this be not his, it deserves to be. For my part, I declare for distributive justice; and from this and what follows, he certainly deserves *those advantages which he acknowledges to have received from the opinion of sober men.*

In the next place, I must beg leave to observe his great address in courting the reader to his party. For intending to assault all poets, both ancient and modern, he discovers not his whole design at once, but seems only to aim at me, and attacques me on my weakest side, my defence of verse.

To begin with me,—he gives me the compellation of *The Author of a Dramatique Essay*, which is a little discourse in dialogue, for the most part borrowed from the observations of others: therefore, that I may not be wanting to him in civility, I return his compliment by calling him *The Author of the Duke of Lerma.*

But (that I may pass over his salute) he takes notice of my great pains to prove rhyme as natural in a serious play, and more effectual than blanck verse. Thus, indeed, I did state the question; but he tells me, *I pursue that which I call natural in a wrong application: for 'tis not the question whether rhyme or not rhyme be best or most natural for a serious subject, but what is nearest the nature of that it represents.*

If I have formerly mistaken the question, I must confess my ignorance so far, as to say I continue still in my mistake: but he ought to have proved that I mistook it; for it is yet but *gratis dictum*: I still shall think I have gained my point, if I can prove that rhyme is best or most natural for a serious subject. As for the question as he states it, whether rhyme be nearest the nature of what it represents, I wonder he should think me so ridiculous as to dispute whether prose or verse be nearest to ordinary conversation.

It still remains for him to prove his inference,—that, since verse is granted to be more remote than prose from ordinary conversation, therefore no serious plays ought to be writ in verse: and when he clearly makes that good, I will acknowledge his victory as absolute as he can desire it.

The question now is, which of us two has mistaken it; and if it appear I have not, the world will suspect *what gentleman that was, who was allowed to speak twice in parliament, because he had not yet spoken to the question;* and perhaps conclude it to be the same, who, 'tis

reported, maintained a contradiction *in terminis*, in the face of three hundred persons.

But to return to verse; whether it be natural or not in plays, is a problem which is not demonstrable of either side: 'tis enough for me that he acknowledges he had rather read good verse than prose: for if all the enemies of verse will confess as much, I shall not need to prove that it is natural. I am satisfied, if it cause delight: for delight is the chief, if not the only, end of poesie: instruction can be admitted but in the second place; for poesie only instructs as it delights. 'Tis true, that to imitate well is a poet's work; but to affect the soul, and excite the passions, and above all to move admiration, which is the delight of serious plays, a bare imitation will not serve. The converse, therefore, which a poet is to imitate, must be heightened with all the arts and ornaments of poesie; and must be such, as, strictly considered, could never be supposed spoken by any without premeditation.

As for what he urges, that *a play will still be supposed to be a composition of several persons speaking* ex tempore; *and that good verses are the hardest things which can be imagined to be so spoken;* I must crave leave to dissent from his opinion, as to the former part of it: for, if I am not deceived, a play is supposed to be the work of the poet, imitating or representing the conversation of several persons; and this I think to be as clear, as he thinks the contrary.

But I will be bolder, and do not doubt to make it good, though a paradox, that one great reason why

prose is not to be used in serious plays, is, because it is too near the nature of converse: there may be too great a likeness; as the most skilful painters affirm, that there may be too near a resemblance in a picture: to take every lineament and feature, is not to make an excellent piece; but to take so much only as will make a beautiful resemblance of the whole; and, with an ingenious flattery of nature, to heighten the beauties of some parts, and hide the deformities of the rest. For so says Horace:

Ut pictura poesis erit. . . . . .
Hæc amat obscurum, vult hæc sub luce videri,
Judicis argutum quæ non formidat acumen.
——————————et quæ
Desperat tractata nitescere posse, relinquit.

In *Bartholomew Fair*, or the lowest kind of comedy, that degree of heightning is used, which is proper to set off that subject. 'Tis true the author was not there to go out of prose, as he does in his higher arguments of comedy, *The Fox*, and *Alchymist*; yet he does so raise his matter in that prose, as to render it delightful; which he could never have performed, had he only said or done those very things that are daily spoken or practised in the Fair; for then the Fair itself would be as full of pleasure to an ingenious person as the play; which we manifestly see it is not. But he hath made an excellent lazar of it: the copy is of price, though the original be vile. You see in *Catiline* and *Sejanus*, where the argument is great, he

sometimes ascends to verse, which shews he thought it not unnatural in serious plays: and had his genius been as proper for rhyme, as it was for humour, or had the age in which he lived attained to as much knowledge in verse as ours, it is probable he would have adorned those subjects with that kind of writing.

Thus prose, though the rightful prince, yet is by common consent deposed, as too weak for the government of serious plays; and he failing, there now start up two competitors; one the nearer in blood, which is blanck verse; the other more fit for the ends of government, which is rhyme. Blank verse is, indeed, the nearer prose, but he is blemished with the weakness of his predecessor. Rhyme (for I will deal clearly) has somewhat of the usurper in him; but he is brave and generous, and his dominion pleasing. For this reason of delight, the Ancients (whom I will still believe as wise as those who so confidently correct them) wrote all their tragedies in verse, though they knew it most remote from conversation.

But I perceive I am falling into the danger of another rebuke from my opponent; for when I plead that the Ancients used verse, I prove not that they would have admitted rhyme, had it then been written: all I can say is only this; that it seems to have succeeded verse by the general consent of poets in all modern languages: for almost all their serious plays are written in it: which, though it be no demonstra-

tion that therefore they ought to be so, yet at least the practice first, and then the continuation of it, shews that it attained the end,—which was to please; and if that cannot be compassed here, I will be the first who shall lay it down. For I confess my chief endeavours are to delight the age in which I live. If the humour of this be for low comedy, small accidents, and raillery, I will force my genius to obey it, though with more reputation I could write in verse. I know I am not so fitted by nature to write comedy: I want that gayety of humour which is required to it. My conversation is slow and dull, my humour saturnine and reserved: in short, I am none of those who endeavour to break jests in company, or make repartees. So that those who decry my comedies do me no injury, except it be in point of profit: reputation in them is the last thing to which I shall pretend. I beg pardon for entertaining the reader with so ill a subject; but before I quit that argument, which was the cause of this digression, I cannot but take notice how I am corrected for my quotation of Seneca, in my defence of plays in verse. My words are these: "Our language is noble, full, and significant; and I know not why he who is master of it, may not cloath ordinary things in it as decently as the Latine, if he use the same diligence in his *choice of words*. One would think, *unlock a door*, was a thing as vulgar as could be spoken; yet Seneca could make it sound high and lofty in his Latin:

Reserate clusos regii postes laris."

But he says of me, *That being filled with the precedents of the Ancients, who writ their plays in verse, I commend the thing; declaring our language to be full, noble, and significant, and charging all defects upon the* ill placing of words, *which I prove by quoting Seneca loftily expressing such an ordinary thing as* shutting a door.

Here he manifestly mistakes; for I spoke not of the placing, but of the choice of words; for which I quoted that aphorism of Julius Cæsar:

Delectus verborum est origo eloquentiæ:

but *delectus verborum* is no more Latin for the placing of words, than *reserate* is Latin for *shut the door*, as he interprets it, which I ignorantly construed *unlock* or *open* it.

He supposes I was highly affected with the sound of those words; and I suppose I may more justly imagine it of him; for if he had not been extremely satisfied with the sound, he would have minded the sense a little better.

But these are now to be no faults; for ten days after his book is published, and that his mistakes are grown so famous that they are come back to him, he sends his *Errata* to be printed, and annexed to his play; and desires, that instead of *shutting* you would read *opening*; which, it seems, was the printer's fault. I wonder at his modesty, that he did not rather say it was Seneca's, or mine; and that in some authors, *reserare* was to *shut* as well as to *open*, as the word *barach*, say the learned, is both to *bless* and *curse*.

Well, since it was the printer, he was a naughty man to commit the same mistake twice in six lines: I warrant you *delectus verborum* for *placing of words* was his mistake too, though the author forgot to tell him of it: if it were my book, I assure you I should. For those rascals ought to be the proxies of every gentleman author, and to be chastised for him, when he is not pleased to own an errour. Yet since he has given the *Errata*, I wish he would have inlarged them only a few sheets more, and then he would have spared me the labour of an answer: for this cursed printer is so given to mistakes, that there is scarce a sentence in the Preface without some false grammar or hard sense in it; which will all be charged upon the poet, because he is so good-natured as to lay but three errours to the printer's account, and to take the rest upon himself, who is better able to support them. But he needs not apprehend that I should strictly examine those little faults, except I am called upon to do it: I shall return therefore to that quotation of Seneca, and answer, not to what he writes, but to what he means. I never intended it as an argument, but only as an illustration of what I had said before concerning the election of words: and all he can charge me with is only this,—that if Seneca could make an ordinary thing sound well in Latin by the choice of words, the same, with the like care, might be performed in English: if it cannot, I have committed an errour on the right hand, by commending too much the copiousness and well-sounding of our

language; which I hope my countrymen will pardon me. At least the words which follow in my Dramatique Essay will plead somewhat in my behalf; for I say there, that this objection happens but seldom in a play; and then too either the meanness of the expression may be avoided, or shut out from the verse by breaking it in the midst.

But I have said too much in the defence of verse; for after all, it is a very indifferent thing to me, whether it obtain or not. I am content hereafter to be ordered by his rule, that is, to write it sometimes, because it pleases me; and so much the rather, because he has declared that it pleases him. But he has taken his last farewell of the Muses, and he has done it civilly, by honouring them with the name of *his long acquaintances*; which is a complement they have scarce deserved from him. For my own part, I bear a share in the publick loss; and how emulous soever I may be of his fame and reputation, I cannot but give this testimony of his style,—that it is extream poetical, even in oratory; his thoughts elevated sometimes above common apprehension; his notions politick and grave, and tending to the instruction of princes, and reformation of states; that they are abundantly interlaced with variety of fancies, tropes, and figures, which the criticks have enviously branded with the name of obscurity and false grammar.

Well, he is now fettered in business of more unpleasant nature: the Muses have lost him, but the common-

wealth gains by it; the corruption of a poet is the generation of a statesman.

He will not venture again into the civil wars of censure; ubi . . . nullos habitura triumphos: if he had not told us he had left the Muses, we might have half suspected it by that word, *ubi*, which does not any way belong to them in that place; the rest of the verse is indeed Lucan's; but that *ubi*, I will answer for it, is his own. Yet he has another reason for this disgust of Poesie; for he says immediately after, that *the manner of plays which are now in most esteem, is beyond his power to perform:* to perform the manner of a thing, I confess is new English to me. *However, he condemns not the satisfaction of others; but rather their unnecessary understanding, who, like Sancho Pança's doctor, prescribe too strictly to our appetites; for,* says he, *in the difference of* Tragedy *and* Comedy, *and of* Farce *itself, there can be no determination but by the taste, nor in the manner of their composure.*

We shall see him now as great a critick as he was a poet; and the reason why he excelled so much in poetry will be evident, for it will appear to have proceeded from the exactness of his judgment. *In the difference of Tragedy, Comedy, and Farce itself, there can be no determination but by the taste.* I will not quarrel with the obscurity of his phrase, though I justly might; but beg his pardon if I do not rightly understand him: if he means, that there is no essential difference betwixt comedy, tragedy, and farce, but what is only made by the people's

taste, which distinguishes one of them from the other, that is so manifest an errour, that I need not lose time to contradict it. Were there neither judge, taste, nor opinion in the world, yet they would differ in their natures; for the action, character, and language of tragedy, would still be great and high; that of comedy lower and more familiar; admiration would be the delight of one, and satyr of the other.

I have but briefly touched upon these things, because, whatever his words are, I can scarce imagine, that *he who is always concerned for the true honour of reason, and would have no spurious issue fathered upon her*, should mean any thing so absurd as to affirm, *that there is no difference betwixt comedy and tragedy, but what is made by the taste only:* unless he would have us understand the comedies of my Lord L., where the first act should be pottages, the second Fricassees, &c. and the fifth a *chere entiere* of women.

I rather guess he means, that betwixt one comedy or tragedy and another, there is no other difference but what is made by the liking or disliking of the audience. This is indeed a less errour than the former, but yet it is a great one. The liking or disliking of the people gives the play the denomination of good or bad; but does not really make or constitute it such. To please the people ought to be the poet's aim, because plays are made for their delight; but it does not follow that they are always pleased with good plays, or that the plays which

please them are always good. The humour of the people is now for comedy; therefore, in hope to please them, I write comedies rather than serious plays; and so far their taste prescribes to me: but it does not follow from that reason, that comedy is to be preferred before tragedy in its own nature; for that which is so in its own nature cannot be otherwise; as a man cannot but be a rational creature: but the opinion of the people may alter, and in another age, or perhaps in this, serious plays may be set up above comedies.

This I think a sufficient answer: if it be not, he has provided me of an excuse; it seems, in his wisdom, he foresaw my weakness, and has found out this expedient for me, *That it is not necessary for poets to study strict reason; since they are so used to a greater latitude than is allowed by that severe inquisition, that they must infringe their own jurisdiction, to profess themselves obliged to argue well.*

I am obliged to him for discovering to me this back-door; but I am not yet resolved on my retreat: for I am of opinion that they cannot be good poets, who are not accustomed to argue well. False reasonings and colours of speech are the certain marks of one who does not understand the stage; for moral truth is the mistress of the poet, as much as of the philosopher. Poesie must resemble natural truth, but it must *be* ethical. Indeed the poet dresses truth, and adorns nature, but does not alter them:

Ficta voluptatis causa sint proxima veris.

Therefore, that is not the best poesy, which resembles notions of things that are not to things that are: though the fancy may be great, and the words flowing, yet the soul is but half satisfied when there is not truth in the foundation. This is that which makes Virgil be preferred before the rest of Poets: in variety of fancy and sweetness of expression, you see Ovid far above him; for Virgil rejected many of those things which Ovid wrote. *A great wit's great work is to refuse*, as my worthy friend, Sir John Berkenhead, has ingeniously expressed it: you rarely meet with any thing in Virgil but truth, which therefore leaves the strongest impression of pleasure in the soul. This I thought myself obliged to say in behalf of Poesy; and to declare, though it be against myself, that when poets do not argue well, the defect is in the workman, not in the art.

And now I come to the boldest part of his discourse, wherein he attacques not me, but all the ancients and moderns; and undermines, as he thinks, the very foundations on which Dramatique Poesie is built. I could wish he would have declined that envy which must of necessity follow such an undertaking, and contented himself with triumphing over me in my opinions of verse, which I will never hereafter dispute with him; but he must pardon me, if I have that veneration for Aristotle, Horace, Ben Johnson, and Corneille, that I dare not serve him in such a cause, and against such heroes, but rather fight under their protection, as Homer reports of little Teucer, who

shot the Trojans from under the large buckler of Ajax Telamon:

Στῆ δ' ἄρ' ὑπ' Αἴαντος σάκεϊ Τελαμωνιάδαο.

He stood beneath his brother's ample shield,
And cover'd there, shot death through all the field,

The words of my noble adversary are these:

But if we examine the general rules laid down for plays by strict reason, we shall find the errours equally gross; for the great foundation which is laid to build upon, is nothing, as it is generally stated, as will appear upon the examination of the particulars.

These particulars, in due time, shall be examined: in the mean while, let us consider what this great foundation is, which he says is nothing, as it is generally stated. I never heard of any other foundation of Dramatique Poesie than the imitation of nature; neither was there ever pretended any other by the ancients, or moderns, or me, who endeavour to follow them in that rule. This I have plainly said in my definition of a play; that it is a just and lively image of human nature, &c. Thus the foundation, as it is generally stated, will stand sure, if this definition of a play be true; if it be not, he ought to have made his exception against it, by proving that a play is not an imitation of nature, but somewhat else which he is pleased to think it.

But it is very plain, that he has mistaken the

foundation for that which is built upon it, though not immediately: for the direct and immediate consequence is this; if nature be to be imitated, then there is a rule for imitating nature rightly; otherwise there may be an end, and no means conducing to it. Hitherto I have proceeded by demonstration; but as our divines, when they have proved a Deity, because there is order, and have inferred that this Deity ought to be worshipped, differ afterwards in the manner of the worship; so, having laid down that nature is to be imitated, and that proposition proving the next, that then there are means which conduce to the imitating of nature, I dare proceed no farther positively; but have only laid down some opinions of the ancients and moderns, and of my own, as means which they used, and which I thought probable for the attaining of that end. Those means are the same which my antagonist calls the foundations,—how properly, the world may judge; and to prove that this is his meaning, he clears it immediately to you, by enumerating those rules or propositions against which he makes his particular exceptions,—as namely, those of time, and place,—in these words: *First, we are told the plot should not be so ridiculously contrived, as to crowd two several countries into one stage; secondly, to cramp the accidents of many years or days into the representation of two hours and an half; and lastly, a conclusion drawn, that the only remaining dispute is, concerning time, whether it should be contained in twelve or twenty-*

four hours; and the place to be limited to that spot of ground where the play is supposed to begin: and this is called nearest nature; for that is concluded most natural, which is most probable, and nearest to that which it presents.

Thus he has only made a small mistake of the means conducing to the end, for the end itself; and of the superstructure for the foundation: but he proceeds: *To shew, therefore, upon what ill grounds they dictate laws for Dramatique Poesy*, &c. He is here pleased to charge me with being magisterial, as he has done in many other places of his Preface. Therefore in vindication of myself, I must crave leave to say, that my whole discourse was sceptical, according to that way of reasoning which was used by Socrates, Plato, and all the Academicques of old, which Tully and the best of the ancients followed, and which is imitated by the modest inquisitions of the Royal Society. That it is so, not only the name will shew, which is, *An Essay*, but the frame and composition of the work. You see, it is a dialogue sustained by persons of several opinions, all of them left doubtful, to be determined by the readers in general; and more particularly defer'd to the accurate judgment of my lord Buckhurst, to whom I made a dedication of my book. These are my words in my Epistle, speaking of the persons whom I introduced in my dialogue: It is true, they differed in their opinions, as it is probable they would; neither do I take upon me to reconcile, but to relate them, leaving your

lordship to decide it in favour of that part which you shall judge most reasonable. And after that, in my Advertisement to the Reader, I said this: The drift of the ensuing discourse is chiefly to vindicate the honour of our English writers from the censure of those who unjustly prefer the French before them. This I intimate, lest any should think me so exceeding vain, as to teach others an art which they understand much better than myself. But this is more than necessary to clear my modesty in that point; and I am very confident that there is scarce any man who has lost so much time as to read that trifle, but will be my compurgator as to that arrogance whereof I am accused. The truth is, if I had been naturally guilty of so much vanity as to dictate my opinions, yet I do not find that the character of a positive or self-conceited person is of such advantage to any in this age, that I should labour to be publickly admitted of that order.

But I am not now to defend my own cause, when that of all the ancients and moderns is in question: for this gentleman, who accuses me of arrogance, has taken a course not to be taxed with the other extream of modesty. Those propositions which are laid down in my discourse, as helps to the better imitation of nature, are not mine, (as I have said,) nor were ever pretended so to be, but derived from the authority of Aristotle and Horace, and from the rules and examples of Ben Johnson and Corneille. These are the men with whom properly he contends, and against

whom he will endeavour to make it evident, that there is no such thing as what they all pretend.

His argument against the unities of place and time, is this: *That it is as impossible for one stage to present two rooms or houses truly, as two countries or kingdoms; and as impossible that five hours or twenty-four hours should be two hours, as that a thousand hours or years should be less than what they are, or the greatest part of time to be comprehended in the less: for all of them being impossible, they are none of them nearest the truth or nature of what they present; for impossibilities are all equal, and admit of no degree.*

This argument is so scattered into parts, that it can scarce be united into a syllogism; yet, in obedience to him, *I will abbreviate* and comprehend as much of it as I can in few words, that my answer to it may be more perspicuous. I conceive his meaning to be what follows, as to the unity of place: (if I mistake, I beg his pardon, professing it is not out of any design to play the *Argumentative Poet*). If one stage cannot properly present two rooms or houses, much less two countries or kingdoms, then there can be no unity of place; but one stage cannot properly perform this: therefore there can be no unity of place.

I plainly deny his minor proposition; the force of which, if I mistake not, depends on this; that the stage being one place cannot be two. This, indeed, is as great a secret, as that we are all mortal; but to requite it with another, I must crave leave to tell him, that though the stage cannot be two places, yet

it may properly represent them, successively, or at several times. His argument is indeed no more than a mere fallacy, which will evidently appear, when we distinguish place, as it relates to plays, into real and imaginary. The real place is that theatre, or piece of ground, on which the play is acted. The imaginary, that house, town, or country, where the action of the *Drama* is supposed to be; or more plainly, where the scene of the play is laid. Let us now apply this to that Herculean argument, *which, if strictly and duly weighed, is to make it evident, that there is no such thing as what they all pretend.* It is impossible, he says, for one stage to present two rooms or houses: I answer, it is neither impossible, nor improper, for one real place to represent two or more imaginary places, so it be done successively; which in other words is no more than this; That the imagination of the audience, aided by the words of the poet, and painted scenes, may suppose the stage to be sometimes one place, sometimes another; now a garden, or wood, and immediately a camp: which, I appeal to every man's imagination, if it be not true. Neither the ancients nor moderns, as much fools as he is pleased to think them, ever asserted that they could make one place two; but they might hope, by the good leave of this author, that the change of a scene might lead the imagination to suppose the place altered: So that he cannot fasten those absurdities upon this scene of a play, or imaginary place of action, that it is one place, and yet two. And this

being so clearly proved, that it is past any shew of a reasonable denial, it will not be hard to destroy that other part of his argument which depends upon it; namely, that it is as impossible for a stage to represent two rooms or houses, as two countries or kingdoms; for his reason is already overthrown, which was, because both were alike impossible. This is manifestly otherwise; for it is proved that a stage may properly represent two rooms or houses; for the imagination being judge of what is represented, will in reason be less chocqu'd with the appearance of two rooms in the same house, or two houses in the same city, than with two distant cities in the same country, or two remote countries in the same universe. Imagination in a man or reasonable creature is supposed to participate of reason; and when that governs, as it does in the belief of fiction, reason is not destroyed, but misled, or blinded: that can prescribe to the reason, during the time of the representation, somewhat like a weak belief of what it sees and hears; and reason suffers itself to be so hood-winked, that it may better enjoy the pleasures of the fiction: but it is never so wholly made a captive, as to be drawn headlong into a perswasion of those things which are most remote from probability: 'tis in that case a free-born subject, not a slave; it will contribute willingly its assent, as far as it sees convenient, but will not be forced. Now there is a greater vicinity in nature betwixt two rooms than betwixt two houses, betwixt two houses than betwixt

two cities, and so of the rest; Reason therefore can sooner be led by Imagination to step from one room into another, than to walk to two distant houses, and yet rather to go thither, than to flye like a witch through the air, and be hurried from one region to another. Fancy and Reason go hand in hand; the first cannot leave the last behind; and though Fancy, when it sees the wide gulph, would venture over as the nimbler, yet it is withheld by Reason, which will refuse to take the leap, when the distance over it appears too large. If Ben Johnson himself will remove the scene from Rome into Tuscany in the same act, and from thence return to Rome, in the scene which immediately follows, Reason will consider there is no proportionable allowance of time to perform the journey, and therefore will chuse to stay at home. So, then, the less change of place there is, the less time is taken up in transporting the persons of the drama, with analogy to reason; and in that analogy, or resemblance of fiction to truth, consists the excellency of the play.

For what else concerns the unity of place, I have already given my opinion of it in my *Essay*;—that there is a latitude to be allowed to it,—as several places in the same town or city, or places adjacent to each other in the same country, which may all be comprehended under the larger denomination of one place; yet with this restriction, that the nearer and fewer those imaginary places are, the greater resemblance they will have to truth; and reason, which

cannot make them one, will be more easily led to suppose them so.

What has been said of the unity of place, may easily be applied to that of time: I grant it to be impossible, that the greater part of time should be comprehended in the less, that twenty-four hours should be crowded into three: but there is no necessity of that supposition. For as *Place*, so *Time* relating to a play, is either imaginary or real: the real is comprehended in those three hours, more or less, in the space of which the play is represented; the imaginary is that which is supposed to be taken up in the representation, as twenty-four hours more or less. Now no man ever could suppose that twenty-four real hours could be included in the space of three: but where is the absurdity of affirming that the feigned business of twenty-four imagined hours may not more naturally be represented in the compass of three real hours, than the like feigned business of twenty-four years in the same proportion of real time? For the proportions are always real, and much nearer, by his permission, of twenty-four to three, than of four thousand to it.

I am almost fearful of illustrating any thing by similitude, lest he should confute it for an argument; yet I think the comparison of a glass will discover very aptly the fallacy of his argument, both concerning time and place. The strength of his reason depends on this, That the less cannot com-

prehend the greater. I have already answered, that we need not suppose it does: I say not that the less can comprehend the greater, but only that it may represent it: as in a glass or Mirrour of half a yard diameter, a whole room and many persons in it may be seen at once; not that it can comprehend that room or those persons, but that it represents them to the sight.

But the author of *The Duke of Lerma* is to be excused for his declaring against the unity of time; for, if I be not much mistaken, he is an interested person; the time of that play taking up so many years as the favour of the Duke of Lerma continued; nay, the second and third act including all the time of his prosperity, which was a great part of the reign of Philip the Third: for in the beginning of the second act he was not yet a favourite, and before the end of the third was in disgrace. I say not this with the least design of limiting the stage too servilely to twenty-four hours, however he be pleased to tax me with dogmatizing in that point. In my dialogue, as I before hinted, several persons maintained their several opinions: one of them, indeed, who supported the cause of the French poesie, said, how strict they were in that particular; but he who answered in behalf of our nation, was willing to give more latitude to the rule; and cites the words of Corneille himself, complaining against the severity of it, and observing what beauties it banished from the Stage. In few words, my own opinion is this,

(and I willingly submit it to my adversary, when he will please impartially to consider it,) that the imaginary time of every play ought to be contrived into as narrow a compass as the nature of the plot, the quality of the persons, and variety of accidents will allow. In comedy I would not exceed twenty-four or thirty hours: for the plot, accidents, and persons of comedy are small, and may be naturally turned in a little compass: But in tragedy the design is weighty, and the persons great; therefore there will naturally be required a greater space of time in which to move them. And this though Ben Johnson has not told us, yet it is manifestly his opinion: for you see that to his comedies he allows generally but twenty-four hours; to his two tragedies, *Sejanus* and *Catiline*, a much larger time: though he draws both of them into as narrow a compass as he can: For he shews you only the latter end of Sejanus his favour, and the conspiracy of Catiline already ripe, and just breaking out into action.

But as it is an errour on the one side, to make too great a disproportion betwixt the imaginary time of the play, and the real time of its representation; so on the other side, it is an oversight to compress the accidents of a play into a narrower compass than that in which they could naturally be produced. Of this last errour the French are seldom guilty, because the thinness of their plots prevents them from it; but few Englishmen, except Ben Johnson, have ever made a plot with variety of design in it, included in

twenty-four hours, which was altogether natural. For this reason, I prefer *The Silent Woman* before all other plays, I think justly; as I do its author, in judgment, above all other poets. Yet of the two, I think that errour the most pardonable, which in too straight a compass crowds together many accidents; since it produces more variety, and consequently more pleasure to the audience; and because the nearness of proportion betwixt the imaginary and real time, does speciously cover the compression of the accidents.

Thus I have endeavoured to answer the meaning of his argument; for as he drew it, I humbly conceive that it was none; as will appear by his proposition, and the proof of it. His proposition was this.

If strictly and duly weighed, it is as impossible for one stage to present two rooms or houses, as two countries or kingdoms, &c. And his proof this: *For all being impossible, they are none of them nearest the truth or nature of what they present.*

Here you see, instead of proof or reason, there is only *petitio principii*: for in plain words, his sense is this; The things are as impossible as one another, because they are both equally impossible: but he takes those two things to be granted as impossible which he ought to have proved such, before he had proceeded to prove them equally impossible: he should have made out first, that it was impossible for one stage to represent two houses, and then have gone forward to prove that it was as equally impossible for a stage to present two houses, as two countries.

After all this, the very absurdity to which he would reduce me is none at all: for he only drives at this, That if his argument be true, I must then acknowledge that there are degrees in impossibilities, which I easily grant him without dispute: and if I mistake not, Aristotle and the School are of my opinion. For there are some things which are absolutely impossible, and others which are only so *ex parte*; as it is absolutely impossible for a thing *to be*, and *not be*, at the same time; but for a stone to move naturally upward, is only impossible *ex parte materiæ*; but it is not impossible for the first mover to alter the nature of it.

His last assault, like that of a Frenchman, is most feeble: for whereas I have observed, that none have been violent against verse, but such only as have not attempted it, or have succeeded ill in their attempt, he will needs, according to his usual custom, improve my observation to an argument, that he might have the glory to confute it. But I lay my observation at his feet, as I do my pen, which I have often employed willingly in his deserved commendations, and now most unwillingly against his judgment. For his person and parts, I honour them as much as any man living, and have had so many particular obligations to him, that I should be very ungrateful, if I did not acknowledge them to the world. But I gave not the first occasion of this difference in opinions. In my Epistle Dedicatory before my *Rival Ladies*, I had said somewhat in behalf of verse, which he was pleased

to answer in his Preface to his plays: that occasioned my reply in my Essay; and that reply begot this rejoynder of his in his Preface to *The Duke of Lerma*. But as I was the last who took up arms, I will be the first to lay them down. For what I have here written, I submit it wholly to him; and if I do not hereafter answer what may be objected against this paper, I hope the world will not impute it to any other reason, than only the due respect which I have for so noble an opponent.

NOTES

DEDICATION

Line 1, p. 1. **Charles Sackville, Lord Buckhurst,** afterwards Earl of Dorset, was a firm friend of Dryden, whom he generously assisted in his distress after the revolution of 1688. Praised by Addison as "one of the finest critics as well as the best poets of his age" (*Spectator*, No. 85), he is now remembered chiefly as the author of the song "To all you ladies now on land." He is the Eugenius of the present essay.

Line 16, p. 1. **The way of writing plays in verse.** Verse here means rhyme. Dryden's *Rival Ladies* (1664) was partly rhyme, partly prose; *The Indian Emperor* (1665) wholly in rhyme.

Line 12, p. 2. **Pompey.** A translation of Corneille's *Mort de Pompée* "by certain persons of honour." It is evident from the reference that Buckhurst was responsible for the fourth act.

Line 13, p. 3. **The French poet.** This poet has never been identified.

Line 6, p. 4. **"As Nature, when she first designs,"** etc. Lines from an address to the King by Sir William Davenant.

Line 24, p. 4. **To defend mine own.** In his dedication to *The Rival Ladies* Dryden maintained the superiority of rhyme to blank verse. In an edition of his plays the following year, Sir Robert Howard defended blank verse (*cf.* the position of Crites in this essay). The *Essay of Dramatic Poesie* contains Dryden's reply. It should be remembered that Howard had been assisted by Dryden in his rhymed tragedy, *The Indian Queen*, and had also employed rhyme in his *Vestal Virgin*.

THE ESSAY

Line 4, p. 8. **That memorable day.** The 3rd June 1665—the day of the great naval battle between the English and the Dutch off the Suffolk coast. See *Annus Mirabilis*.

Line 23, p. 8. **Eugenius.** See note to line 1, p. 1.

Line 1, p. 9. **Crites.** Dryden's brother-in-law, Sir Robert Howard.

Line 1, p. 9. **Lisideius.** An anagram of the Latinised form (Sidleius) of the name of Sir Charles Sedley, or Sidley, the author of several plays and some spirited lyrics.

Line 1, p. 9. **Neander.** Dryden himself. It is probable that he assumed this name (which means "novus homo"—νέος ἀνήρ—or "parvenu") to mark the distinction between himself and the other interlocutors in the dialogue, all of whom belonged to a higher social rank.

Line 16, p. 11. **Two poets.** One of these was probably Robert Wild (1609-1679), author of *Iter Boreale*, in eulogy of General Monk; the other possibly Richard Flecknoe, the writer of much bad verse and a favourite target for Dryden's wit (see opening lines of *MacFlecknoe*).

Line 23, p. 11. **Clevelandism.** John Cleveland (1613-1658), a cavalier poet, whose writings are full of extravagances, "clenches" (or "clinches" = puns, verbal quibbles) and "catachresis" (the straining of words out of their proper meanings). Two examples of his style are given later in the Essay.

Line 14, p. 13. **Withers.** George Wither or Withers (1588-1667), the writer of some beautiful lyrics and a great deal of doggerel. As a Puritan, and one of Cromwell's majors, he suffered much at the hands of Royalist satirists.

Lines 20, 21, p. 13. **Candles' ends.** The reference is to an auction in which bids are accepted so long as a candle-end is still burning.

Lines 4-7, p. 16. **Sir John Suckling** (1608-1642); **Edmund Waller** (1605-1687); **Sir John Denham** (1615-1668); **Abraham Cowley** (1618-1667). Poets whose reputation stood very high at the time. The extravagant praise bestowed upon them here well illustrates the critical taste of Dryden's age, and, incidentally, its common neglect of older English writers. Cowley's verse is mainly of the "metaphysical" class—that is, it is full of extravagant fancy, the abuse of learning, straining after startling effects, and verbal quibbles and conceits. Waller and Denham were particularly esteemed as the supposed "reformers" of English versification (see Dryden's Preface to *The Rival Ladies*).

Line 16, p. 17. **A genere et fine.** The "logical objection" against the definition of Lisideius is that it would apply equally well to—*e.g.* narrative poetry and romance, and hence is not really a definition, because it does not indicate the specific and differential characteristics of the drama.

Line 18, p. 20. **The three unities.** It is important to note (as Dryden does further on), that no mention of the Unity of Place is to be found in either Aristotle or Horace.

Line 26, p. 22. **Corneille** (1606-1684), the great French dramatist, wrote an essay on the Unities (the third of his *Discours sur la Poésie dramatique*), to which Dryden is greatly indebted in the present discussion.

Lines 12, 13, p. 23. **Ben Jonson has observed in his Discoveries.** Crites seems to be thinking of the following passage:—"As a house, consisting of divers materials, becomes one structure and one dwelling, so an action composed of divers parts may become one fable, epic or dramatic."

Lines 20, 21, p. 25. **Father Ben.** Jonson.

Lines 18, 19, p. 27. **Aristotle indeed divides the integral parts of the play into four.** The division here erroneously ascribed to Aristotle was really made by J. C. Scaliger (1484-1558).

Line 25, p. 28. **Jornadas.** "Jornada" strictly means "a day's journey." On the mediæval French stage the word *journée* was used for "act" or division of a play.

Line 7, p. 29. **A late writer.** Probably Howard.

Lines 24, 25, p. 29. **So good cheap.** Advantageously = *bon marché*.

Lines 20-22, p. 31. **Euripides . . . in one of his tragedies.** *The Suppliants*.

Lines 6, 7, p. 32. **Says the French poet.** Corneille.

Line 11, p. 34. **Sock and buskin.** Symbols respectively of comedy and tragedy.

Line 25, p. 36. **Dr Donne** (1573-1631). The founder of what, since Dr Johnson, we have been accustomed to call the "metaphysical" school. (See reference to Cowley, in note to lines 4-7, p. 16, above.) Donne was a man of real genius, but his verse was ruined by false taste, and is scarcely readable now.

Lines 3, 4, p. 37. **Had Cain been Scot**, etc. From Cleveland's *Rebel Scot.*

Lines 8, 9, p. 37. **For beauty, like white powder**, etc. From Cleveland's *Rupertisms.*

Lines 22, 23, p. 39. **French romances.** The *romans à longue haleine*, or long-winded romances of Honoré d'Urfé, Gomberville, La Calprenède, and Mdlle. de Scudéri, were exceedingly popular in England just after the Restoration. An offshoot from the chivalrous and pastoral romances of earlier date, they dealt much with questions of gallantry and the casuistry of love.

Lines 23, 24, p. 41. **Corneille and some other Frenchmen reformed their theatre.** The reform consisted mainly in the firm establishment of the Unities. The formal introduction of these is generally attributed by historians of French literature to Jean Chapelain (1595-1674). It is recorded that about 1636, Chapelain enlisted Richelieu's sympathies in their behalf; and Richelieu's position of practical dictator in such matters enabled him to impose them as laws upon the playwrights of the time. When in the *Cid* (1636), Corneille himself treated these Unities with considerable freedom, Richelieu referred the question to the newly-founded Academy; and the judgment of the Academy in their favour was regarded as final.

Lines 28, 29, p. 42. **Montagues and Capulets.** See *Romeo and Juliet.*

Line 12, p. 43. **The Red Bull.** Situated in St John's Street, Clerkenwell, this was one of the early London theatres which survived the Commonwealth. It was, however, demolished soon after the Restoration. Malone says it was famous "for entertainments adapted to the taste of the lower orders of people."

Line 14, p. 44. **Success.** Simply issue, whether fortunate or unfortunate.

Line 5, p. 45. **Perspective.** A "perspective glass," or telescope.

Line 29, p. 45; line 1, p. 46. **Plays of Calderon.** These were several adaptations of plays by Pedro Calderon de la Barca (1600-1681), the famous Spanish dramatist, on the restoration stage; the most noteworthy being Sir Samuel Tuke's *Adventures of Five Hours*, referred to further on in the Essay.

Line 5, p. 46. **Rollo.** *The Bloody Brother*, or *Rollo, Duke of Normandy*, generally ascribed to Fletcher.

Line 16, p. 46. **Oleo.** A medley or mixture; a corruption of the Spanish word *olla* (an earthen pot) in the phrase *olla podrida* = a hodge-podge.

Line 26, p. 47. **Protatic persons.** Characters appearing in the introductory part of a play, or employed simply to explain the action without being themselves directly connected with it. (Greek προτείνω, to put forward with a purpose.)

Line 23, p. 51. **Magnetic Lady.** See Act III., sc. 1, 2.

Line 25, p. 51. **Undecent.** Simply unbecoming, unfitting. The word is used in this older, unspecialised sense (= not fitting "the decorum of the stage") later in the Essay.

Lines 2, 3, p. 53. **The Scornful Lady.** By Beaumont and Fletcher.

Line 20, p. 55. **The Liar.** Corneille's comedy, *Le Menteur*, founded upon a Spanish play by Alarcon.

Line 3, p. 56. **Molière.** Jean Baptiste Poquelin, now always known by his adopted name of Molière (1622-1673), the greatest of French writers of comedy. Many of his plays were translated and adapted by English dramatists at this period.

Line 3, p. 56. **The younger Corneille.** Thomas Corneille (1625-1709), a voluminous playwright, who does not, however, deserve to be mentioned with his brother, Pierre.

Line 4, p. 56. **Quinault.** Philippe Quinault (1636-1688), author of several tragedies.

Line 14, p. 56. **The Adventures.** *The Adventures of Five Hours.* (See note to line 29, p. 45, above.) Diego is a comic character in this play.

Line 9, p. 58. **Primum mobile.** In the old Ptolemaic system of astronomy, the ninth sphere which gave motion to the eight lower spheres.

Lines 15-17, p. 59. **Cinna; Pompey; Polieucte.** Tragedies by Corneille.

Line 20, p. 59. **Speak by the hour-glass.** In reference to the exceedingly long speeches in French tragedy. The use of the hour-glass in the pulpit was then very common. Though one course of the sand was accounted good measure, enthusiastic preachers were frequently known to indulge in "a second glass."

Line 16, p. 60. **Fletcher's Plays.** The use of Fletcher's name alone is justified by the fact that he had much the larger share in the plays commonly published as Beaumont and Fletcher's, many of which were written after Beaumont's death.

Lines 12-14, p. 63. **The Maid's Tragedy.** By Beaumont and Fletcher. *The Alchemist*, *The Silent Woman* (*Epicœne*), and *The Fox* (*Volpone*), by Ben Jonson.

Lines 12-14, p. 63. **Extreme severity in his judgment on . . . Shakespeare.** No passage in Jonson bears out Dryden's statement. The criticism of Shakespeare's over-facility and occasional carelessness in the *Discoveries*—Jonson's only direct censure of Shakespeare—is certainly not marked by "extreme severity." Possibly Dryden was thinking of Jonson's attack on some general dramatic characteristics of his day in the Prologue to *Every Man in his Humour*.

Line 25, p. 65. **Philipin.** The common name for the comic servant, a stock character in French imitations of Spanish comedy.

Line 26, p. 65. **French Diego.** See note to line 14, p. 56, above.

Lines 29, 30, p. 66. **Old comedies . . . all writ in verse of six feet or Alexandrines.** Here, as elsewhere, Dryden was careless about details; moreover, the Early English drama was comparatively little studied in his age. Most of our older comedies were in verse of six feet; but other measures, and sometimes prose, were also employed. The twelve-syllable verse, which is the standard French heroic measure, is called Alexandrine, from an old French poem on Alexander in which it was used.

Line 12, p. 69. **Mr Hales of Eton.** John Hales (1584-1656), at one time professor of Greek at Oxford.

Line 24, p. 74. **τὸ γελοῖον.** The ludicrous element. Line 6, p. 75. **ἦθος.** Disposition. **πάθος.** Passion, suffering.

Lines 25, 26, p. 85. **That person from whom you have borrowed your strongest Arguments.** Sir R. Howard.

Lines 22, 23, p. 88. **Preface to the Rival Ladies.** Dryden's dedication to Sir Roger Boyle, Earl of Orrery, in which rhyme is defended.

Line 2, p. 90. **Pindaric way.** Irregularly as regards both the length of the lines and the arrangement of the rhymes; as in the so-called "Pindaric odes" of Cowley and other writers. Dryden's

own *Alexander's Feast* is a splendid example of the style. Gray's *Progress of Poesy* and *The Bard* are well-known later poems belonging to the same class.

Line 3, p. 90. **Siege of Rhodes.** A play by Sir William Davenant, interesting as the first performed on the reopening of the theatres in London after the time of the Commonwealth.

Line 3, p. 92. **Bays.** Laurels.

Line 21 p. 92. **Hopkins and Sternhold's Psalms.** This translation, made in the reign of Elizabeth, is referred to by Dryden as a good example of doggerel verse. Sandys' *Paraphrase* (1636) has much greater poetic merit.

Line 20, p. 92. **Mustapha.** By Sir Roger Boyle.

Line 3, p. 93. **Indian Queen.** By Howard and Dryden (1664). *Indian Emperor.* By Dryden (1665).

Lines 5, 6, p. 94. **Blank verse is acknowledged to be far too low for a poem.** At this same time Milton was completing his *Paradise Lost.* See his reference to "English heroic verse without rime," in the note prefixed to that poem.

Line 15, p. 98. **The Water Poet.** John Taylor (1580-1654), an industrious writer of poor verse, who owed his nickname to the fact that he had been a Thames waterman.

DEFENCE OF THE ESSAY

Line 15, p. 103. **The Great Favourite, or The Duke of Lerma.** By Sir R. Howard. In his preface to this tragedy (published 1668) Howard attacked Dryden on various points dealt with in the *Essay.* The general nature of his contentions will be inferred from Dryden's rejoinder: "The whole tone of the preface is that of one who wished to have it supposed that he was writing concerning a subject rather beneath his notice. . . . This affectation of supercilious censure appears to have greatly provoked Dryden" (Scott). Hence the pungency of this *Defence.*

Line 15, p. 104. **An Infant Dimock.** The Dimocks (or Dymokes) were hereditary champions of England.

Lines 20, 21, p. 104. **One who has the reputation of understanding all things.** Evelyn, the diarist, described Howard as

"pretending to all manner of arts and sciences, . . . not ill-natured, but insufferably boasting." He is probably the original of Sir Positive At-All in Shadwell's *Sullen Lovers*.

Line 27, p. 108. **Lazar.** Leper; here perhaps, leper-house, or hospital, in reference to Bartholomew's Hospital.

Line 29, p. 108. **Catiline** and **Sejanus.** Tragedies by Jonson.

Line 14, p. 113. **He has taken his last farewell of the Muses.** Howard's reply was written in the tone of one about to abandon the drama.

Line 17, p. 115. **My Lord L.** According to Malone, John Maitland, then Earl, afterwards Duke, of Lauderdale.

Line 11, p. 117. **Sir John Berkenhead,** or **Birkenhead** (1616-1679). Author of *Mercurius Aulicus*, the journal of the royalists at Oxford (1642-1645), and some satirical poems.

Line 30, p. 117. **As Homer reports of little Teucer.** Iliad, viii. 267.

Lines 16, 17, p. 121. **The character of a positive or self-conceited person.** See note to lines 20, 21, p. 104.

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ESSAY ON CRITICISM



POPE

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ESSAY ON CRITICISM

BY

ALEXANDER POPE

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INTRODUCTION

ALEXANDER POPE, the author of this poem, was born in Lombard Street, London, May 21st, 1688. His father, who was in business as a linen-draper in the Metropolis, was a man of some considerable education and culture. The child, therefore, spent his infancy and youth in an atmosphere of refinement and love of letters. His education, owing to the fact that his parents were staunch Roman Catholics, was not prosecuted at any of the better-class schools, but was pursued under tutors, too often incapable, and at Catholic seminaries of a very third-rate character. Still, he accumulated a marvellous amount of knowledge in manifold branches of study; and exhibited a precocity of genius only paralleled by Cowley.

When the youthful poet was little more than twelve years of age, his father, having amassed a fortune in trade, retired from active participation in it, and purchased a rural retreat at Binfield, in Windsor Forest. Here the boy pursued both his studies and his poetical essays, his *Ode on Solitude* being written when he was entering his thirteenth year, while at fourteen he composed his poem on *Silence*, in imitation of Rochester's *Nothing*. At fifteen he translated the First Book of the *Thebais* of Statius, in which he first revealed the

technical mastery he was acquiring over the English heroic couplet.

At sixteen, Pope wrote his *Pastorals*. These, on being shown in MS. to the leading poets and critics of the day, elicited the warmest praise, and procured for him the friendship of Wycherley, by whom he was introduced to Addison, Swift, Steele, Arbuthnot, and others. The *Pastorals* were published in *Tonson's Miscellany* for 1709. That same year he wrote the poem which we here present to the reader, though it did not see the light till 1711. Meantime, having temporarily taken up his residence in London, he was studying the best models in poetry with great assiduity, the veteran critic, William Walsh, being his metrical mentor.

The interest in the youth, awakened by the *Essay on Criticism*, was exalted into enthusiasm by the publication of a paper in the *Spectator* (No. 253), in which the great Addison, then, as now, regarded as one of the most judicious critics in the language, pronounced it a masterpiece of its kind, while honestly pointing out certain blemishes in it. The reading public were quite ready, therefore, to welcome Pope's next production, the first draft of the *Rape of the Lock*, which appeared in *Linton's Miscellany* for 1712. In that form it was very much less elaborate than now it is, the present "machinery" of sylphs and gnomes being, as Professor Minto says, an afterthought which the poet carried into effect in his re-issue of the poem in 1714.

Pope was now regarded as in the very first rank of

English poets, and every succeeding work only confirmed the judgment formed by competent critics. Henceforward his life was to be summed up in his books. Of few men has the saying been more absolutely true that "he lived to write." His interest in anything else was secondary and transient. In March 1713 he published his *Windsor Forest*, with a flattering dedication to Lord Lansdowne, "Secretary at War"; followed by the *Messiah*, which appeared in the *Spectator*. Pope hitherto, though a Tory, a Jacobite, and a Catholic, had been on the best of terms with Addison and the Whig coterie of bards and reviewers; but a breach now occurred which reflected little credit on either side, and is an amusing, if a somewhat melancholy, revelation of jealousy on the one side and inordinate vanity on the other. Pope never could endure criticism, and to indicate faults in his work was to lay up for oneself "a rod in pickle," to be applied when a favourable opportunity occurred.

In 1713 he commenced his translation of Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, completing them in 1725. The former work is entirely his own translation; in the rendering of the latter he executed only twelve out of the twenty-four Books, Broome being responsible for Books 2, 6, 8, 11, 12, 16, 18, 23; and Fenton for Books 1, 4, 19, 20. From this undertaking, which was published by subscription, the poet cleared over £8000, after deducting the share paid to his coadjutors, and all other expenses. He was thereby rendered independent, and could take up house in London, in place of living in lodgings. He

persuaded his parents to leave Windsor Forest; and, having purchased a house and grounds at Twickenham, he removed thither in 1718. The translation of Homer is no longer esteemed as a translation *in se*. It is read as a free and richly poetical rendering of the great Greek poems, but every scholar feels, with regard to the *Iliad* at least, that there is more of Pope's personality present in it than of Homer's.

During the latter part of the period devoted to this undertaking he had accepted a commission from the booksellers to edit the second *recension* of Shakespeare's plays. For such a task Pope had neither the taste nor the training, and the enterprise was a commercial failure. Possibly this may have been owing to Theobald's scathing exposure of Pope's incapacity as an editor, in his volume "Shakespeare Restored."

But in the *Dunciad* the poet had his revenge. This great satire, first published in 1728, has occasioned no little discussion in the critical world as to the real *raison d'être* of it. This, of course, is not the place to argue on one side or the other. Suffice to say that Pope's aim seems originally to have been twofold—(1) to punish certain anonymous scribblers who had been discharging their shafts of malice at some of the greater poets of the age; and (2) to apply the lash to those who had either criticised him, or had not spoken of him in such warm terms of laudation as the bard thought his due. Theobald, Cibber, Dennis, Lintot, Phillips, Curl, Oldmixon, and many others were satirised in verse that is as wicked in its wit as it is faultless in its metrical flow.

The other members of the Scriblerus Club—Swift, Arbuthnot, Gay, Bolingbroke, etc.—were said to have contributed several couplets, but these have never been identified, nor does the story rest on better foundation than rumour.

During the period 1732-38, the *Satires and Epistles of Horace*, and the *Essay on Man*, appeared. In the former we gain a graphic picture of the political and social conditions of the time, and how wide was the gulf separating men of opposite parties. The *Essay on Man*, as Mark Pattison says, in the introduction to his admirable edition of it, belongs to the same intellectual movement as Butler's *Analogy*—viz. the attempt to give to religion a rational basis. Bolingbroke is said to have suggested the subject and furnished the arguments. Certainly the acuteness of many of the aphorisms is beyond the range of Pope's sharp but essentially shallow mind. The work, however, has had a popularity that is amazing, and has contributed more quotable lines to the poetical repertory of controversialists than almost any other poem.

With the exception of his *Moral Essays*, published during the last three or four years of his life, the *Essay on Man* was his last great work. Pope's incessant industry could not but tell in the long run on his weak frame. He became old before his time, and in his last days suffered not a little from asthma and general debility. He died 30th May 1744, and was buried in the church at Twickenham.

Pope's services to English poetry have been variously

estimated. Wordsworth and Coleridge stigmatised him as the arch-corrupter of poetic taste, and as the introducer of a vitiated style into poetry. Mr Courthope, on the other hand, maintains that Pope's "theory" of poetry, if compared with the "mode" it displaced, was no less distinct and salutary a return to nature, than that whereof Cowper became the leader fifty years later. The truth probably lies between these two conflicting statements. Pope certainly broke with the prevailing post-Restoration canons of verse. He imposed new rules, based upon a truer conception of the needs of the case — viz. the necessity for cultivating increased technical perfection in verse, if it were not to sink into a sort of rhyming prose. But Pope, when he turned to Nature, did not represent it at first-hand like Wordsworth, and thus make his poetry the mirror of the feelings suggested by mountain, mere, river, and wood. He strove, on the other hand, to picture Nature in that ideal form which he thought would be most acceptable to his readers, the wits and beaux and dames of society, to whom his work was so largely addressed. On one point, however, there is general agreement among all classes of critics, that Pope is the greatest master of technical method that has yet appeared in English literature. Rarely does he permit a halting or a faulty line to fall from his pen.

Metrical Analysis. The *Essay* is written in the rhymed heroic measure. This consists of *ten* syllables or *five* metrical feet, the *stress* or accent falling on the second syllable of each foot—for example:

"'Tis hárd | to sáy | if gréat | er wánt | of skíll."

This measure is often called the *Iambic Pentameter* or *heroic couplet*, and was exceedingly popular in the eighteenth century.

The *Essay on Criticism*, as has been said, was an attempt by Pope to condense, classify, and give as perfect and novel expression as he could to floating opinions about the poet's aims and methods. If we analyse the "*Essay*" with care, we shall find there is really little originality in the *matter* or thought, and that the sense of freshness is present only in the *manner* or measure employed. Most of the maxims are free translations or paraphrases of the aphorisms contained in the various treatises on the *Art of Poetry* by Horace, Quintilian, Vida, Boileau, Rapin, and Bossu. The brilliancy of the style is really all to which Pope can lay claim as being distinctively new. Never, however, has the *heroic couplet*—the measure in which the *Essay* is written—been employed with greater grace, polish, ease, and brilliancy. In Pope's hand it became a perfect metrical medium for attaining the true end of all poetry—viz. the presentation of noble thoughts in noble numbers.

AN ESSAY ON CRITICISM

PART I

'Tis hard to say, if greater want of skill
Appear in writing or in judging ill;
But, of the two, less dangerous is the offence
To tire our patience, than mislead our sense.
Some few in that, but numbers err in this;
Ten censure wrong for one who writes amiss;
A fool might once himself alone expose,
Now one in verse makes many more in prose.
'Tis with our judgments as our watches, none
Go just alike, yet each believes his own.
In poets as true genius is but rare,
True taste as seldom is the critic's share;
Both must alike from Heaven derive their light,
These born to judge, as well as those to write.
Let such teach others who themselves excel,
And censure freely, who have written well.
Authors are partial to their wit, 'tis true,
But are not critics to their judgment, too?

Yet, if we look more closely, we shall find
Most have the seeds of judgment in their mind:
Nature affords at least a glimmering light.
The lines, though touched but faintly, are drawn right;
But, as the slightest sketch, if justly traced,
Is, by ill-colouring, but the more disgraced,
So, by false learning, is good sense defaced:
Some are bewildered in the maze of schools,
And some made coxcombs nature meant but fools.
In search of wit these lose their common sense,
And then turn critics in their own defence:
Each burns alike, who can or cannot write,
Or with a rival's or an eunuch's spite.
All fools have still an itching to deride,
And fain would be upon the laughing side.
If Mævius scribble in Apollo's spite,
There are, who judge still worse than he can write.
Some have at first for wits, then poets, passed,
Turned critics next, and proved plain fools at last.
Some neither can for wits nor critics pass,
As heavy mules are neither horse nor ass.
Those half-learned witlings, numerous in our isle,
As half-formed insects on the banks of Nile;
Unfinished things, one knows not what to call,
Their generation's so equivocal:
To tell them would a hundred tongues require,
Or one vain wit's, that might a hundred tire.

But you, who seek to give and merit fame,
And justly bear a critic's noble name,
Be sure yourself and your own reach to know,
How far your genius, taste, and learning, go;
Launch not beyond your depth, but be discreet,
And mark that point where sense and dullness meet.

Nature to all things fixed the limits fit,
And wisely curbed proud man's pretending wit.
As on the land while here the ocean gains,
In other parts it leaves wide sandy plains;
Thus in the soul while memory prevails,
The solid power of understanding fails.
Where beams of warm imagination play,
The memory's soft figures melt away.
One science only will one genius fit;
So vast is art, so narrow human wit:
Not only bounded to peculiar arts,
But oft in those confined to single parts,
Like kings, we lose the conquests gained before,
By vain ambition still to make them more:
Each might his several province well command,
Would all but stoop to what they understand.

First follow nature, and your judgment frame
By her just standard, which is still the same:
Unerring nature, still divinely bright,
One clear, unchanged, and universal light,
Life, force, and beauty, must to all impart,

At once the source, and end, and test of art.
Art from that fund each just supply provides;
Works without show, and without pomp presides:
In some fair body thus the informing soul
With spirits feeds, with vigour fills the whole,
Each motion guides, and every nerve sustains;
Itself unseen, but in the effects remains.
Some, to whom Heaven in wit has been profuse,
Want as much more, to turn it to its use;
For wit and judgment often are at strife,
Though meant each other's aid, like man and wife.
'Tis more to guide, than spur the muse's steed;
Restrain his fury, than provoke his speed;
The wingèd courser, like a generous horse,
Shews most true mettle when you check his course.
Those rules, of old discovered, not devised,
Are nature still, but nature methodised;
Nature, like liberty, is but restrained
By the same laws which first herself ordained.
Hear how learned Greece her useful rules indites,
When to repress, and when indulge our flights.
High on Parnassus' top her sons she shewed,
And pointed out those arduous paths they trod;
Held from afar, aloft, the immortal prize,
And urged the rest by equal steps to rise.
Just precepts thus from great examples given,
She drew from them what they derived from Heaven.

The generous critic fanned the poet's fire,
And taught the world with reason to admire.
Then criticism the muse's handmaid proved,
To dress her charms, and make her more beloved:
But following wits from that intention strayed,
Who could not win the mistress, wooed the maid;
Against the poets their own arms they turned,
Sure to hate most the men from whom they learned.
So modern 'pothecaries, taught the art
By doctors' bills, to play the doctor's part,
Bold in the practice of mistaken rules,
Prescribe, apply, and call their masters fools.
Some on the leaves of ancient authors prey,
Nor time nor moths e'er spoil so much as they.
Some drily plain, without invention's aid,
Write dull receipts how poems may be made.
These leave the sense, their learning to display,
And those explain the meaning quite away.

You, then, whose judgment the right course would steer,
Know well each ancient's proper character;
His fable, subject, scope in every page;
Religion, country, genius of his age:
Without all these at once before your eyes,
Cavil you may, but never criticise.
Be Homer's works your study and delight,
Read them by day, and meditate by night;
Thence form your judgment, thence your maxims bring,

And trace the muses upward to their spring.
Still, with itself compared, his text peruse;
And let your comment be the Mantuan Muse.
When first young Maro, in his boundless mind,
A work to outlast immortal Rome designed,
Perhaps he seemed above the critic's law,
And but from nature's fountain scorned to draw:
But when to examine every part he came,
Nature and Homer were, he found, the same.
Convinced, amazed, he checks the bold design;
And rules as strict his laboured work confine,
As if the Stagirite o'erlooked each line.
Learn hence for ancient rules a just esteem;
To copy nature is to copy them.
Some beauties yet no precepts can declare,
For there's a happiness as well as care.
Music resembles poetry: in each
Are nameless graces which no methods teach,
And which a master-hand alone can reach.
If, where the rules not far enough extend
(Since rules were made but to promote their end),
Some lucky license answer to the full
The intent proposed, that license is a rule.
Thus Pegasus, a nearer way to take,
May boldly deviate from the common track.
Great wits sometimes may gloriously offend,
And rise to faults true critics dare not mend;

From vulgar bounds with brave disorder part,
And snatch a grace beyond the reach of art,
Which, without passing through the judgment, gains
The heart, and all its end at once attains.
In prospects, thus, some objects please our eyes,
Which out of nature's common order rise,
The shapeless rock or hanging precipice.
But though the ancients thus their rules invade
(As kings dispense with laws themselves have made),
Moderns, beware! or if you must offend
Against the precept, ne'er transgress its end;
Let it be seldom, and compelled by need;
And have, at least, their precedent to plead.
The critic else proceeds without remorse,
Seizes your fame, and puts his laws in force.
I know there are, to whose presumptuous thoughts
Those freer beauties, even in them, seem faults.
Some figures monstrous and mis-shaped appear,
Considered singly, or beheld too near,
Which, but proportioned to their light, or place,
Due distance reconciles to form and grace.
A prudent chief not always must display
His powers in equal ranks and fair array,
But with the occasion and the place comply,
Conceal his force, nay, seem sometimes to fly.
Those oft are stratagems which errors seem,
Nor is it Homer nods, but we that dream.

Still green with bays each ancient altar stands,
Above the reach of sacrilegious hands;
Secure from flames, from envy's fiercer rage,
Destructive war, and all-involving age.
See, from each clime the learned their incense bring;
Hear, in all tongues consenting Pæans ring!
In praise so just let every voice be joined,
And fill the general chorus of mankind.
Hail! bards triumphant! born in happier days;
Immortal heirs of universal praise!
Whose honours with increase of ages grow,
As streams roll down, enlarging as they flow;
Nations unborn your mighty names shall sound,
And worlds applaud, that must not yet be found!
Oh may some spark of your celestial fire,
The last, the meanest of your sons inspire,
(That, on weak wings, from far pursues your flights,
Glows while he reads, but trembles as he writes),
To teach vain wits a science little known,
To admire superior sense, and doubt their own!

PART II

Of all the causes which conspire to blind
Man's erring judgment, and misguide the mind,
What the weak head with strongest bias rules,
Is pride, the never-failing vice of fools.
Whatever nature has in worth denied,
She gives in large recruits of needful pride;
For as in bodies, thus in souls, we find
What wants in blood and spirits, swelled with wind:
Pride, where wit fails, steps in to our defence,
And fills up all the mighty void of sense.
If once right reason drives that cloud away,
Truth breaks upon us with resistless day.
Trust not yourself; but your defects to know,
Make use of every friend—and every foe.
A little learning is a dangerous thing;
Drink deep, or taste not the Pierian spring:
There, shallow draughts intoxicate the brain,
And drinking largely sobers us again.
Fired at first sight with what the muse imparts,
In fearless youth we tempt the heights of arts,
While from the bounded level of our mind,
Short views we take, nor see the lengths behind;

But, more advanced, behold, with strange surprise,
New distant scenes of endless science rise!
So, pleased at first the towering Alps we try,
Mount o'er the vales, and seem to tread the sky,
The eternal snows appear already passed,
And the first clouds and mountains seem the last:
But, those attained, we tremble to survey
The growing labours of the lengthened way,
The increasing prospect tires our wandering eyes,
Hills peep o'er hills, and Alps on Alps arise!

A perfect judge will read each work of wit
With the same spirit that its author writ:
Survey the whole, nor seek slight faults to find
Where nature moves, and rapture warms the mind;
Nor lose, for that malignant dull delight,
The generous pleasure to be charmed with wit.
But, in such lays as neither ebb nor flow,
Correctly cold, and regularly low,
That, shunning faults, one quiet tenor keep;
We cannot blame indeed—but we may sleep.
In wit, as nature, what affects our hearts
Is not the exactness of peculiar parts;
'Tis not a lip, or eye, we beauty call,
But the joint force and full result of all.
Thus, when we view some well-proportioned dome
(The world's just wonder, and even thine, O Rome!),
No single parts unequally surprise,

All comes united to the admiring eyes;
No monstrous height, or breadth, or length, appear;
The whole at once is bold, and regular.

Whoever thinks a faultless piece to see,
Thinks what ne'er was, nor is, nor e'er shall be.
In every work regard the writer's end,
Since none can compass more than they intend;
And if the means be just, the conduct true,
Applause, in spite of trivial faults, is due.
As men of breeding, sometimes men of wit,
To avoid great errors, must the less commit:
Neglect the rules each verbal critic lays,
For not to know some trifles is a praise.
Most critics, fond of some subservient art,
Still make the whole depend upon a part:
They talk of principles, but notions prize,
And all to one loved folly sacrifice.

Once on a time, La Mancha's knight, they say,
A certain bard encountering on the way,
Discoursed in terms as just, with looks as sage,
As e'er could Dennis, of the Grecian stage;
Concluding all were desperate sots and fools,
Who durst depart from Aristotle's rules.
Our author, happy in a judge so nice,
Produced his play, and begg'd the knight's advice;
Made him observe the subject, and the plot,
The manners, passions, unities; what not?

All which, exact to rule, were brought about,
Were but a combat in the lists left out.
'What! leave the combat out?' exclaims the knight.
'Yes, or we must renounce the Stagirite.'
'Not so, by heaven!' (he answers in a rage)
'Knights, squires, and steeds, must enter on the stage.'
'So vast a throng the stage can ne'er contain.'
'Then build a new, or act it in a plain.'

Thus critics of less judgment than caprice,
Curious, not knowing, not exact, but nice,
Form short ideas; and offend in arts
(As most in manners) by a love to parts.

Some to conceit alone their taste confine,
And glittering thoughts struck out at every line;
Pleased with a work where nothing's just or fit;
One glaring chaos and wild heap of wit.
Poets, like painters, thus, unskilled to trace
The naked nature and the living grace,
With gold and jewels cover every part,
And hide with ornaments their want of art.
True wit is nature to advantage dressed;
What oft was thought, but ne'er so well expressed;
Something, whose truth convinced at sight we find,
That gives us back the image of our mind.
As shades more sweetly recommend the light,
So modest plainness sets off sprightly wit.
For works may have more wit than does them good,

As bodies perish through excess of blood.
Others for language all their care express,
And value books, as women men, for dress:
Their praise is still—'the style is excellent';
The sense, they humbly take upon content.
Words are like leaves; and, where they most abound,
Much fruit of sense beneath is rarely found:
False eloquence, like the prismatic glass,
Its gaudy colours spreads on every place;
The face of nature we no more survey.
All glares alike, without distinction gay:
But true expression, like the unchanging sun,
Clears and improves whate'er it shines upon;
It gilds all objects, but it alters none.
Expression is the dress of thought, and still
Appears more decent, as more suitable;
A vile conceit, in pompous words expressed,
Is like a clown in regal purple dressed:
For different styles with different subjects sort,
As several garbs with country, town, and court.
Some by old words to fame have made pretence,
Ancients in phrase, mere moderns in their sense;
Such laboured nothings, in so strange a style,
Amaze the unlearned, and make the learned smile.
Unlucky, as Fungoso in the play,
These sparks with awkward vanity display
What the fine gentleman wore yesterday;

And but so mimic ancient wits at best,
As apes our grandsires, in their doublets dressed.
In words, as fashions, the same rule will hold,
Alike fantastic, if too new, or old.
Be not the first by whom the new are tried,
Nor yet the last to lay the old aside.

But most by numbers judge a poet's song,
And smooth or rough, with them, is right or wrong:
In the bright muse, though thousand charms conspire,
Her voice is all these tuneful fools admire;
Who haunt Parnassus but to please their ear,
Not mend their minds; as some to church repair,
Not for the doctrine, but the music there.
These equal syllables alone require,
Though oft the ear the open vowels tire;
While expletives their feeble aid do join;
And ten low words oft creep in one dull line;
While they ring round the same unvaried chimes,
With sure returns of still expected rhymes;
Where'er you find 'the cooling western breeze,'
In the next line, it 'whispers through the trees':
If crystal streams 'with pleasing murmurs creep,'
The reader's threatened (not in vain) with 'sleep':
Then, at the last and only couplet fraught
With some unmeaning thing they call a thought,
A needless Alexandrine ends the song,
That, like a wounded snake, drags its slow length along.

Leave such to tune their own dull rhymes, and know
What's roundly smooth or languishingly slow;
And praise the easy vigour of a line,
Where Denham's strength, and Waller's sweetness join.
True ease in writing comes from art, not chance,
As those move easiest who have learned to dance.
'Tis not enough no harshness gives offence,
The sound must seem an echo to the sense.
Soft is the strain when Zephyr gently blows,
And the smooth stream in smoother numbers flows;
But when loud surges lash the sounding shore,
The hoarse, rough verse should like the torrent roar:
When Ajax strives some rock's vast weight to throw,
The line too labours, and the words move slow;
Not so, when swift Camilla scours the plain,
Flies o'er the unbending corn, and skims along the main.
Hear how Timotheus' varied lays surprise,
And bid alternate passions fall and rise!
While, at each change, the son of Libyan Jove
Now burns with glory, and then melts with love;
Now his fierce eyes with sparkling fury glow,
Now sighs steal out, and tears begin to flow:
Persians and Greeks like turns of nature found,
And the world's victor stood subdued by sound!
The power of music all our hearts allow,
And what Timotheus was, is Dryden now.
Avoid extremes; and shun the fault of such,

Who still are pleased too little or too much.
At every trifle scorn to take offence,
That always shows great pride, or little sense:
Those heads, as stomachs, are not sure the best,
Which nauseate all, and nothing can digest.
Yet let not each gay turn thy rapture move;
For fools admire, but men of sense approve:
As things seem large which we through mist descry,
Dullness is ever apt to magnify.

Some foreign writers, some our own despise;
The ancients only, or the moderns prize.
Thus wit, like faith, by each man is applied
To one small sect, and all are damned beside.
Meanly they seek the blessing to confine,
And force that sun but on a part to shine,
Which not alone the southern wit sublimes,
But ripens spirits in cold northern climes;
Which from the first has shone on ages past,
Enlights the present, and shall warm the last;
Though each may feel increases and decays,
And see now clearer and now darker days.
Regard not then if wit be old or new,
But blame the false, and value still the true.

Some ne'er advance a judgment of their own,
But catch the spreading notion of the town;
They reason and conclude by precedent,
And own stale nonsense which they ne'er invent.

Some judge of authors' names, not works, and then
Nor praise nor blame the writings, but the men.
Of all this servile herd, the worst is he
That in proud dullness joins with quality.
A constant critic at the great man's board,
To fetch and carry nonsense for my lord.
What woeful stuff this madrigal would be,
In some starved hackney sonnetteer, or me!
But let a lord once own the happy lines,
How the wit brightens! how the style refines!
Before his sacred name flies every fault,
And each exalted stanza teems with thought!
The vulgar thus through imitation err;
As oft the learned by being singular:
So much they scorn the crowd, that if the throng
By chance go right, they purposely go wrong:
So schismatics the plain believers quit,
And are but damned for having too much wit.
Some praise at morning what they blame at night;
But always think the last opinion right.
A muse by these is like a mistress used,
This hour she's idolised, the next abused;
While their weak heads, like towns unfortified,
'Twixt sense and nonsense daily change their side.
Ask them the cause; they're wiser still they say;
And still to-morrow's wiser than to-day.
We think our fathers fools, so wise we grow

Our wiser sons, no doubt, will think us so.
Once school-divines this zealous isle o'erspread.
Who knew most sentences was deepest read;
Faith, Gospel, all, seemed made to be disputed,
And none had sense enough to be confuted:
Scotists and Thomists now in peace remain,
Amidst their kindred cobwebs in Duck Lane.
If faith itself has different dresses worn,
What wonder modes in wit should take their turn?
Oft, leaving what is natural and fit,
The current folly proves the ready wit;
And authors think their reputation safe,
Which lives as long as fools are pleased to laugh.
Some valuing those of their own side or mind,
Still make themselves the measure of mankind:
Fondly we think we honour merit then,
When we but praise ourselves in other men.
Parties in wit attend on those of state,
And public faction doubles private hate.
Pride, malice, folly, against Dryden rose,
In various shapes of parsons, critics, beaux;
But sense survived, when merry jests were past;
For rising merit will buoy up at last.
Might he return, and bless once more our eyes,
New Blackmores and new Millbourns must arise:
Nay, should great Homer lift his awful head,
Zoilus again would start up from the dead.

Envy will merit, as its shade, pursue;
But like a shadow, proves the substance true:
For envied wit, like Sol eclipsed, makes known
The opposing body's grossness, not its own.
When first that sun too powerful beams displays,
It draws up vapours which obscure its rays;
But even those clouds at last adorn its way,
Reflect new glories, and augment the day.

Be thou the first true merit to befriend;
His praise is lost, who stays till all commend.
Short is the date, alas! of modern rhymes,
And 'tis but just to let them live betimes.
No longer now that golden age appears,
When patriarch-wits survived a thousand years:
Now length of fame (our second life) is lost,
And bare threescore is all even that can boast;
Our sons their fathers' failing language see,
And such as Chaucer is, shall Dryden be.
So when the faithful pencil has designed
Some bright idea of the master's mind,
Where a new world leaps out at his command,
And ready nature waits upon his hand;
When the ripe colours soften and unite,
And sweetly melt into just shade and light;
When mellowing years their full perfection give,
And each bold figure just begins to live,
The treacherous colours the fair art betray,

And all the bright creation fades away!
Unhappy wit, like most mistaken things,
Atones not for that envy which it brings.
In youth alone its empty praise we boast,
But soon the short-lived vanity is lost:
Like some fair flower the early spring supplies,
That gaily blooms, but even in blooming dies.
What is this wit, which must our cares employ?
The owner's wife, that other men enjoy;
Then most our trouble still when most admired,
And still the more we give, the more required;
Whose fame with pains we guard, but lose with ease,
Sure some to vex, but never all to please;
'Tis what the vicious fear, the virtuous shun,
By fools 'tis hated, and by knaves undone!
If wit so much from ignorance undergo,
Ah! let not learning too commence its foe!
Of old, those met rewards who could excel,
And such were praised who but endeavoured well:
Though triumphs were to generals only due,
Crowns were reserved to grace the soldiers too.
Now they who reach Parnassus' lofty crown,
Employ their pains to spurn some others down;
And, while self-love each jealous writer rules,
Contending wits become the sport of fools:
But still the worst with most regret commend,
For each ill author is as bad a friend.

To what base ends, and by what abject ways,
Are mortals urged, through sacred lust of praise!
Ah ne'er so dire a thirst of glory boast,
Nor in the critic let the man be lost.
Good-nature and good sense must ever join;
To err is human, to forgive, divine.
But if in noble minds some dregs remain,
Not yet purged off, of spleen and sour disdain;
Discharge that rage on more provoking crimes,
Nor fear a dearth in these flagitious times.
No pardon vile obscenity should find,
Though wit and art conspire to move your mind;
But dullness with obscenity must prove
As shameful sure as impotence in love.
In the fat age of pleasure, wealth, and ease,
Sprung the rank weed, and thrived with large increase:
When love was all an easy monarch's care;
Seldom at council, never in a war:
Jilts ruled the state, and statesmen farces writ;
Nay, wits had pensions, and young lords had wit:
The fair sat panting at a courtier's play,
And not a mask went unimproved away:
The modest fan was lifted up no more,
And virgins smiled at what they blushed before.
The following license of a foreign reign,
Did all the dregs of bold Socinus drain;
Then unbelieving priests reformed the nation,

And taught more pleasant methods of salvation;
Where Heaven's free subjects might their rights dispute,
Lest God himself should seem too absolute:
Pulpits their sacred satire learned to spare,
And vice admired to find a flatterer there!
Encouraged thus, wit's Titans braved the skies,
And the press groaned with licensed blasphemies.
These monsters, critics! with your darts engage,
Here point your thunder, and exhaust your rage!
Yet shun their fault, who, scandalously nice,
Will needs mistake an author into vice;
All seems infected that the infected spy,
As all looks yellow to the jaundiced eye.

PART III

LEARN, then, what morals critics ought to show,
For 'tis but half a judge's task, to know.
'Tis not enough, taste, judgment, learning, join;
In all you speak, let truth and candour shine:
That not alone what to your sense is due
All may allow; but seek your friendship too.

Be silent always, when you doubt your sense;
And speak, though sure, with seeming diffidence:
Some positive, persisting fops we know,
Who, if once wrong, will needs be always so;
But you, with pleasure, own your errors past,
And make each day a critique on the last.

'Tis not enough your counsel still be true;
Blunt truths more mischief than nice falsehoods do;
Men must be taught as if you taught them not,
And things unknown proposed as things forgot.
Without good breeding truth is disapproved;
That only makes superior sense beloved.

Be niggards of advice on no pretence;
For the worst avarice is that of sense.
With mean complacence, ne'er betray your trust,
Nor be so civil as to prove unjust.
Fear not the anger of the wise to raise;
Those best can bear reproof, who merit praise.
'Twere well might critics still this freedom take,
But Appius reddens at each word you speak,
And stares, tremendous, with a threatening eye,
Like some fierce tyrant in old tapestry.
Fear most to tax an honourable fool,
Whose right it is, uncensured, to be dull;
Such, without wit, are poets when they please,
As, without learning, they can take degrees.
Leave dangerous truths to unsuccessful satires,
And flattery to fulsome dedicators,
Whom, when they praise, the world believes no more,
Than when they promise to give scribbling o'er.
'Tis best sometimes your censure to restrain,
And charitably let the dull be vain:
Your silence there is better than your spite,
For who can rail so long as they can write?
Still humming on, their drowsy course they keep,
And, lashed so long, like tops, are lashed asleep.
False steps but help them to renew the race,
As, after stumbling, jades will mend their pace.
What crowds of these, impenitently bold,

In sounds and jingling syllables grown old,
Still run on poets in a raging vein,
Even to the dregs and squeezing of the brain;
Strain out the last dull droppings of their sense,
And rhyme with all the rage of impotence!
Such shameless bards we have; and yet, 'tis true,
There are as mad, abandoned critics, too.
The bookful blockhead, ignorantly read,
With loads of learned lumber in his head,
With his own tongue still edifies his ears,
And always listening to himself appears.
All books he reads, and all he reads assails,
From Dryden's Fables down to D'Urfey's Tales.
With him most authors steal their works, or buy:
Garth did not write his own Dispensary.
Name a new play, and he's the poet's friend,
Nay, shewed his faults—but when would poets mend?
No place so sacred from such fops is barred,
Nor is Paul's Church more safe than Paul's Churchyard:
Nay, fly to altars; there they'll talk you dead;
For fools rush in where angels fear to tread.
Distrustful sense with modest caution speaks,
It still looks home, and short excursions makes;
But rattling nonsense in full volleys breaks,
And, never shocked, and never turned aside,
Bursts out, resistless, with a thundering tide.
But where's the man who counsel can bestow,

Still pleased to teach, and yet not proud to know?
Unbiassed, or by favour, or by spite;
Not dully prepossessed, nor blindly right;
Though learned, well-bred; and though well-bred, sincere;
Modestly bold, and humanly severe;
Who to a friend his faults can freely show,
And gladly praise the merit of a foe?
Blessed with a taste exact, yet unconfined;
A knowledge both of books and human kind;
Generous converse; a soul exempt from pride;
And love to praise, with reason on his side?

Such once were critics: such the happy few,
Athens and Rome in better ages knew.
The mighty Stagirite first left the shore,
Spread all his sails, and durst the deeps explore;
He steered securely, and discovered far,
Led by the light of the Maeonian star.
Poets, a race long unconfined and free,
Still fond and proud of savage liberty,
Received his laws: and stood convinced 'twas fit,
Who conquer'd nature, should preside o'er wit.

Horace still charms with graceful negligence,
And without method talks us into sense;
Will, like a friend, familiarly convey
The truest notions in the easiest way.
He who, supreme in judgment as in wit,
Might boldly censure, as he boldly writ,

Yet judged with coolness, though he sung with fire;
His precepts teach but what his works inspire.
Our critics take a contrary extreme.
They judge with fury, but they write with phlegm:
Nor suffers Horace more in wrong translations
By wits, than critics in as wrong quotations.

See Dionysius Homer's thoughts refine,
And call new beauties forth from every line!
Fancy and art in gay Petronius please,
The scholar's learning, with the courtier's ease.

In grave Quintilian's copious work, we find
The justest rules and clearest method joined:
Thus useful arms in magazines we place,
All ranged in order, and disposed with grace,
But less to please the eye, than arm the hand,
Still fit for use, and ready at command.

Thee bold Longinus! all the Nine inspire,
And bless their critic with a poet's fire.
An ardent judge, who, zealous in his trust,
With warmth gives sentence, yet is always just:
Whose own example strengthens all his laws;
And is himself that great sublime he draws.

Thus long succeeding critics justly reigned,
License repressed, and useful laws ordained.
Learning and Rome alike in empire grew;
And arts still followed where her eagles flew;
From the same foes, at last, both felt their doom,

And the same age saw learning fall, and Rome.
With tyranny then superstition joined.
As that the body, this enslaved the mind;
Much was believed, but little understood,
And to be dull was construed to be good;
A second deluge learning thus o'errun,
And the monks finished what the Goths begun.

At length Erasmus, that great injured name
(The glory of the priesthood, and the shame!),
Stemmed the wild torrent of a barbarous age,
And drove those holy Vandals off the stage.

But see! each muse, in Leo's golden days,
Starts from her trance, and trims her withered bays,
Rome's ancient genius, o'er its ruins spread,
Shakes off the dust, and rears his reverent head.
Then sculpture and her sister arts revive;
Stones leaped to form, and rocks began to live;
With sweeter notes each rising temple rung;
A Raphael painted, and a Vida sung.
Immortal Vida! on whose honoured brow
The poet's bays and critic's ivy grow:
Cremona now shall ever boast thy name,
As next in place to Mantua, next in fame!

But soon by impious arms from Latium chased,
Their ancient bounds the banished muses passed.
Thence arts o'er all the northern world advance,
But critic-learning flourished most in France;

The rules a nation born to serve, obeys;
And Boileau still in right of Horace sways.
But we, brave Britons, foreign laws despised,
And kept unconquered and uncivilised;
Fierce for the liberties of wit, and bold,
We still defied the Romans, as of old.
Yet some there were, among the sounder few
Of those who less presumed and better knew,
Who durst assert the juster ancient cause,
And here restored wit's fundamental laws.
Such was the muse, whose rule and practice tell
'Nature's chief masterpiece is writing well.'
Such was Roscommon, not more learned than good,
With manners generous as his noble blood;
To him the wit of Greece and Rome was known,
And every author's merit, but his own.
Such late was Walsh—the muse's judge and friend,
Who justly knew to blame or to commend;
To failings mild, but zealous for desert;
The clearest head, and the sincerest heart.
This humble praise, lamented shade! receive,
This praise at least a grateful muse may give:
The muse, whose early voice you taught to sing,
Prescribed her heights, and pruned her tender wing,
(Her guide now lost) no more attempts to rise,
But in low numbers short excursions tries;
Content, if hence the unlearned their wants may view,

The learned reflect on what before they knew:
Careless of censure, nor too fond of fame;
Still pleased to praise, yet not afraid to blame;
Averse alike to flatter, or offend;
Not free from faults, nor yet too vain to mend.

THE END

NOTES

Line

5. '*Some few in that, but numbers err in this*'—supply the verb 'err' before the first "in," reading—"Some few err in that."

8. '*Now one in verse*'—supply 'fool' after 'one.'

11. 'As'—here has the demonstrative force of "because" or "seeing that is so." Shakespeare uses it in the same sense. Cf. *Macbeth*, Act i. Sc. 7, 78.

17. *Wit.* In this poem Pope uses the word "wit" in a variety of distinct significations. Here it means 'genius' or 'taste'; in l. 36 'a man of taste and culture'; in l. 53 it clearly implies 'human intellect or understanding'; in ll. 80 and 82 its signification is more uncertain, varying between '*taste*' and '*judgment*'; but in l. 209 there can be no doubt that 'judgment' is the meaning attached to this somewhat ambiguous expression. It is a curious study to note the different significations then associated with a word, which, with us, has only the restricted meaning of "humorous fancy" attached to it.

18. 'critics'—after this supply 'partial' from the preceding line.

20. *Judgment.* A somewhat similar uncertainty of meaning can be traced with regard to this word. In ll. 9 and 82 it implies our decisions on matters of taste; in l. 18 it means "understanding"; while in ll. 20 and 68 "the verdicts of conscience" on questions of moral principle are clearly indicated.

Line

21. *Nature* = 'natural intelligence,' as opposed to 'revelation.'

26. *Maze of schools* = the varying and contradictory Schools of philosophy and theology.

31. 'or . . . or'—a contraction due to the poetical license accorded to writers of verse, the first '*or*' being of course equivalent to '*either*.'

32. '*itching to deride*' = an invincible propensity to ridicule their neighbours.

33. '*The laughing side*' = the side that ridicules, not that which is ridiculed.

34. *Maevius*—a poetaster and indifferent satirist of the age of Augustus. He carped at Horace and Virgil, and was satirised by the former in Epode x. l. 2 and by Virgil in Eclogue iii. l. 90. William Gifford styled one of his satires on the Della Cruscan folly the *Maeviad*.

35. '*Who judge still worse than he can write*'—meaning that those whose judgment is so much at fault as to praise the work of Maevius are worse than he.

37. plain fools = fools pure and simple, with no saving qualities. *Cf.* Dryden's lines in MacFlecknoe (155-169).

41. *Half-formed insects on the banks of Nile.* The insect and reptile life engendered among the slime of the Nile's periodical overflows was a favourite simile among the writers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Cf. *Antony and Cleopatra*, Act v. Sc. 2, 60.

43. *generation.* A somewhat ambiguous use of the word. It may either mean their "birth" or their "genus." The balance of probability seems to incline to the latter meaning.

61. *So vast is art*, etc. A sort of paraphrase on the familiar

Line

Latin proverb, '*ars longa, vita brevis*'—art is lasting, but life is fleeting. *Cf.* Longfellow, *Psalm of Life*, l. 13.

62. *arts.* Note the difference of the senses in which 'art' as used in l. 61, and 'arts' in l. 62. The former is in the abstract sense of the body of principles which constitutes critical taste; the latter their application to practice in various concrete forms. *Cf.* Worsfold, *Judgment in Literature*, p. 5.

65. *vain ambition.* The same thought appears in *Macbeth*, Act. i. Sc. 7, l. 26.

83. *Though meant each other's aid.* Note the use of the figure ellipsis here, in the omission of the preposition "for."

86. *Wingèd courser* = Pegasus. This was a marvellous winged horse, generated from the blood of the Gorgon Medusa when Perseus had cut off her head. Hesiod informs us in the *Theogony* that it received its name from being born near the sources (πηγη) of ocean. Pegasus had its abode on Mount Helicon, and the fountain Hippocrene came bubbling up on the spot where the fiery steed struck its hoof into the ground. It became a great favourite of the Muses, and, after being tamed by Neptune or Minerva, was lent to Bellerophon that he might destroy the Chimaera. No sooner was this act achieved than Pegasus threw its rider off, because Bellerophon had the temerity to wish to fly up to heaven. The horse, however, continued its flight alone, and was placed among the constellations by Jupiter.

88-110. A remarkable resemblance exists between this passage and Churchill's *Apology to the Critical Reviewers*, ll. 49-70.

Line

88. *of old discovered.* The earliest writers on criticism were Plato, Aristotle, Hermogenes, Longinus, Dion Chrysostom, Aristides, Philostratus, Libanius, Themistius, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Plutarch, Cicero, Varro, Quintilian, Aulus Gellius, etc.

94. Parnassus—a celebrated mountain of Phocis; so called from Parnassus, son of Neptune. It was sacred to the Muses, who were supposed to haunt its shady valleys.

96. *The immortal prize* = fame.

97. *Equal steps*—steps carefully proportioned to the greatness of the undertaking.

98. *Just precepts* = precepts justly or accurately drawn from great examples. *Cf.* Quintilian's well-known passage, "nec enim artibus editis factum est ut argumenta inveniremus, sed dicta sunt omnia antequam praeciperentur."

104. *following wits*—the participle, here used as an adjective. The meaning of the word "wits" here is somewhat ambiguous, and must be read as equivalent to "writers." The passage is intended to imply that those who failed to succeed as poets devoted themselves to criticism.

108. See note on l. 619.

112. *Some on the leaves*, etc. = plagiarise from older and unknown authors.

115. *Write dull receipts how poems may be made.* This is a reference to the large number of imitations of Horace's poem *De Arte Poetica*, which appeared in the early decades of the eighteenth century. "*The Art of English Poetry*, containing—i. Rules for Making Verses; ii. A Collection of the most Natural, Agreeable, and

Line

Sublime Thoughts, etc.; iii. A Dictionary of Rhymes," by Edward Bysshe, was only one of the most popular of many treatises of the kind.

119. *Each ancient's proper character* = the special theme and manner of treatment of each of the great writers of antiquity.

124. *Homer*—earliest and greatest of the poets of Greece whose works have been preserved. The dates of his birth and death are unknown, although the fact is generally admitted that he must have flourished about 150 years after the Trojan War, *circa* 1100 B.C. Seven great cities contended for the honour of being his birthplace, Smyrna, Chios, Colophon, Salamis, Rhodes, Argos, and Athens. His chief works are the *Iliad*, descriptive of the scenes of the Trojan War, and the *Odyssey*, relating the wanderings of Ulysses or Odysseus.

125. "*Meditate by night*"—supply "on them."

129. '*The Mantuan Muse*' = Virgil. Also, in the following line, "Young Maro" is a reference to the same poet, whose full name was Publius Virgilius Maro, born B.C. 70, died B.C. 19. His poems are the *Bucolics*, the *Georgics*, and the *Aeneid*—the last-named the story of the life of Aeneas after the fall of Troy. Virgil, according to Pope, first intended to write a poem on the Alban and Roman affairs, but found the theme beyond his powers. For this reason, then, he imitated Homer. "Quum canerem reges et proelia, Cynthius aurem vellit et admonuit." Virg. *Eclog.* vi. l. 3.

133. *And but from nature's fountain.* Note the different use

Line

of "but," in ll. 133 and 134. In the former instance it is employed as a preposition, meaning "except"; in the latter it must be parsed as a "co-ordinative conjunction."

138. *The Stagirite*—Aristotle. He takes the title from Stagira, on the Strymonic Gulf, where he was born, B.C. 384. He was one of the greatest philosophers of antiquity. He wrote on well-nigh all subjects. His treatises on Rhetoric and Poetics laid the foundations of what may be termed the System, or Philosophy of Criticism.

140. *To copy nature is to copy them.* This canon of nature, which was so universally maintained by Boileau and Pope, is the central doctrine of the "Classical School of Poetry" as opposed to "the Romantic." It is curious that in ll. 271 and 272 the author directly contradicts his present statement when he sneers at Dennis the critic for—

> 'Concluding all were desperate sots and fools,
> Who durst depart from Aristotle's rules.'

155. *Snatch a grace*, etc. Carlyle expanded this thought in the passage, "Genius has privileges of its own; it selects an orbit for itself, and, be this never so eccentric, we mere star-gazers must at last begin to observe it and calculate its laws." The lines from 146—155 are an amplification of the words of Quintilian, B. ii. cap. 13.

166. *Their precedent to plead.* This is a good example of the slavish adherence to the models of antiquity which Classicism exacted from its followers. The modern

Line

writer was not to dare to break any rule of Aristotle, Horace, or Quintilian, unless he could cite an example from some of the ancients under which to cloak his delinquency. There is little wonder that the eighteenth century was in many respects the most barren in our literature, when criticism was based on such principles.

169. "I know there are"—analogous to the "sunt quos . . . collegisse juvat" of Horace, *Odes*, B. i. 1, 3.

180. *Homer nods.* An allusion taken from Horace, *De Arte Poetica*, l. 359, "Quandoque bonus dormitat Homerus"—when even good Homer nods.

181. 'Green with bays'—wreathed with laurel.

183. *Secure from flames, from envy's fiercer rage.* This may either refer to the consuming of the great Alexandrian Library at the Serapion by Order of the Khalif Omar, or to that envious spleen, which, under the guise of orthodoxy, committed to the flames the works of those of whose abilities it was jealous.

195. *spark of celestial fire—cf.* Milton, *Paradise Lost*, B. iii. l. 51, "Celestial Light, shine inward, and the mind through all her powers, irradiate," etc.

204. "*Pride, the never-failing vice of fools.*" *Cf.* Pope's *Essay on Man*, for the other side of the picture:

> "In pride, unreasoning pride, our error lies;
> All quit their sphere and rush into the skies:
> Pride still is aiming at the blest abodes;
> Men would be angels; angels would be gods."

203-4. *what the weak head*, etc. A somewhat involved construction. 'Pride' is here the nominative of the sen-

Line

tence and also the antecedent of the compound relative 'what,' 'head' being in the accusative after the verb 'rules.' The direct construction would be "Pride, the never-failing vice of fools, rules the weak head with strongest bias."

206. *recruits*—has the sense here of compensation: if nature denies real worth to anyone she compensates for it by giving them large store of self-confidence.

216. *Pierian Spring*—a fountain in Thessaly, in the district of Pieria, sacred to the Muses. All who drank of the spring were supposed to be inspired with the poetic afflatus.

221. *The bounded level*—the restricted outlook. The same sense as here, is attached to the participial adjective in *Hamlet*, Act ii. Sc. 2, l. 260, "I could be bounded in a nutshell."

224. *Science*—here used in the sense of knowledge generally—the original meaning of the Latin *Scientia*. Chaucer uses the word in the same sense, *The Parlement of Foules*, l. 22, "al this new science that men lere."

230-32. *Growing labours . . . arise.* Note the use of the rhetorical figure of prolepsis, the anticipation of the feelings and emotions before they are actually experienced.

233-34. *A perfect . . . writ.* Note the use of the figure ellipsis here, in the omission of the preposition "in." On the other hand, if "in" had been substituted for "with," the sense of something lacking in the line would not be so pronounced. For the analogue of this passage, *cf.* Horace, *De Arte Poetica*, ll. 347-352.

Line

240. *Regularly low*—maintaining a dead level of persistent mediocrity.

248. *Thine, O Rome.* The reference is here to the dome of St Peter's at Rome. The original architect of the great church was Bramante, who laid the foundations in 1506. Succeeding architects departed from his idea of a massive cupola over a Greek cross. The present dome is the design of Michael Angelo. The church was consecrated in 1626. The dome of St Peter's is 139 feet in diameter and 330 feet from the ground; that of St Paul's, London, 112 feet in diameter and 215 feet high. The reference here to "the well-proportioned dome" is probably to St Paul's, which was erected about 1708-10, a year or two before this poem appeared.

255. *Regard the writer's end*—the great maxim of Boileau, which Pope has here adopted.

266. Note that 'all' here is in the accusative after 'sacrifice.'

267. *La Mancha's Knight*=Don Quixote. That inimitable romance by Miguel de Cervantes (1547-1616), the greatest of Spanish authors, *Don Quixote*, appeared in two parts, the first in 1605, the second in 1615.

270. *John Dennis*—a critic of some learning and independence (born 1657, died 1734), who is noted for being perhaps the best-abused man in English literature. He was embroiled in controversy all his days. Swift lampooned him, Pope satirised him, both here and in the *Dunciad*. Yet he gave well-nigh as good as he got, and both Swift and Pope writhed under his vitriolic abuse. He wrote *The Advancement and Reformation of Modern Poetry*

Line

(1701), and the *Grounds of Criticism in Poetry* (1714).

276. *Unities*—((1) of *place*, (2) *time*, and (3) *action*), were the three canons of classical drama—(1) that the scenes should be in the same place, (2) that all the events should be such as happen within a single day, (3) that nothing should be admitted not directly relevant to the development of the plot.

289. *Some to conceit alone*, etc.—a reference to the metaphysical school of poets—Cowley, Crashaw, Herbert, Vaughan, Herrick, Carew, Chamberlayne, Cleveland, and others—who affected far-fetched images and obscure ideas in their poems. The mighty influence of Donne was greatly to blame for this style.

297-300. *True wit . . . mind. Cf.* Hamlet's advice to the players. Act iii. Sc. 2, 14-30.

306. "*And value books . . . dress*"—the verb "value" must be supplied in the subordinate clause from the principal one.

309-10. *Words are like leaves . . . rarely found.* The germ of this thought is found in *Hamlet*, Act iii. Sc. 3, l. 93—'Words without thoughts never to heaven go.'

311. *Prismatic glass.* A familiar experiment in optics. A ray of light, being directed through a triangular wedge-shaped piece of glass called a 'prism,' is refracted and thereby resolved into its component shades, which appear in the "spectrum" in the following order: violet, indigo, blue, green, yellow, orange, red.

320. *A vile conceit.* Vile is not used here in its sense of *bad*, but as *trifling*, or empty.

322. *Different styles with different subjects sort.* Note the

Line

word "sort" as being used in the old meaning of the term "to agree or be suitable to." Cf. *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, Act i. Sc. 3, l. 63, "My will is something *sorted* with his wish."

328. *Fungoso.* See Ben Jonson's Comedy, *Every man out of his Humour.* Fungoso was the son of a miserly rustic, who aped the courtier's dress, manner, and speech, but could never conceal the taint of rusticity. *Cf.* Act v. Sc. 4.

346. *Expletives*—such stock phrases as appear in ancient ballad poetry. Langland is very faulty in this respect, and even Chaucer is not wholly free from blame, in his "God wote," "in good sooth," and the like.

356. *Alexandrine*—a line of six iambic feet, or twelve syllables, so called from being used in an old French poem on Alexander the Great. Others derive it from Alexander de Bernay, one of the authors of that poem. It is the ordinary verse of French tragedy. French Alexandrines are arranged in couplets, alternately acatalectic with masculine rhymes and hypercatalectic with feminine rhymes. Drayton's *Poly-olbion* is written in Alexandrines, and the Spenserian stanza in the *Faerie Queen* always ends with one. The next line to this (357) is an admirable example of the measure.

361. *Denham — Waller.* Sir John Denham (1615-1668) wrote several poems, the chief of which is *Cooper's Hill.* Edmund Waller (1606-1687) was one of the most mellifluous and polished of seventeenth-century poets. He did much to improve the rhythmical

Line

smoothness of English verse. Much of his poetry, however, is stilted and unreal in sentiment.

368-69. These two lines are intended to convey onomatopoetically the sound of the waves falling on the shore, in imitation of Homer, *Iliad*, B. i. 34, '*βη δ' ἀκέων παρὰ θῖνα πολυφλοίσβοιο θαλάσσης.*'

370. Ajax was the son of Telamon, and, next to Achilles, was the bravest of all the Greeks. The lines referred to in the text are to be found in the *Iliad*, B. vii. l. 268. When he was chosen the champion of the Greeks, against Hector, he suddenly seized a mighty stone and hurled it at the Trojan hero.

Δεύτερος αὖτ' Αἴας πολὺ ωείζονα λᾶαν ἀείρας
Ἥκ' ἐπιδινήσας, ἐπέρεισε δὲ ἶν' ἀπέλεθρον.

Which Pope himself rendered in his translation of the *Iliad*:

"Then Ajax seized the fragment of a rock,
Applied each nerve, and swinging round on high,
With force tempestuous let the ruin fly.
The huge stone thundering through his buckler broke,
His slackened knees received the numbing stroke."

372-3. Camilla was queen of the Volsci, and, according to Virgil (*Aeneid*, B. vii. 807-812), was possessed of a swiftness superior to that of the winds: "cursuque pedum praevertere ventos — outstripped the wind in speed upon the plain." Pope's lines are a close translation of those of Virgil.

374-381. This passage contains an undoubted reference to Dryden's great ode, "Alexander's Feast, or *The*

Line

Power of Music," stanza 4. Alexander boasted himself the Son of Jupiter Ammon, asserting that the god had visited his mother Olympias in the form of a serpent, which gave occasion for the latter to make the witty retort that she wished her son would cease embroiling her with Juno.

380. Alexander, having conquered the known world, is reported to have wept because there were no more worlds to conquer.

394. *Some foreign . . . despise*—the verb "despise" must be supplied before 'foreign writers,' as 'prize' in the following line must be read before 'ancients.'

440. *School-divines.* Adherents of the scholastic philosophy.

441. *Sentences*—a reference to the writings of Peter Lombard (1100-1159), *Magister Sententiarum*, or the "Master of Sentences." This was taken from the name of his great work, arranged in four Books (*Sententiarum Libri IV.*), a collection of Sentences from Augustine and other Church Fathers on points of Christian doctrine, with objections and replies also collected from authors of repute. The work had an immense popularity.

444. *Scotists and Thomists.* The former were the followers of Duns Scotus (1265 ?-1308), a Franciscan Schoolman, who contended that Thomas Aquinas was wrong in seeking in speculation instead of in practice, the foundation of Christian Theology. Theology, he held, rests on faith, and faith was not speculative but practical—an act of will. Thomas Aquinas (1224-1274) was also another great Schoolman, belonging to the Dominican order, and the controversy

Line

between the Scotists and the Thomists on the freedom of the will lasted for at least a century after the death of Scotus.

445. *Duck Lane*—was a place near Smithfield where second-hand books were sold.

458. *Against Dryden.* The great author of *Absalom and Achitophel* had many enemies, both in the Court and out of it. The *Duke of Buckingham* satirised him and his work in the *Rehearsal*; Shadwell sneered at him in his plays; Jeremy Collier fulminated against him in his *Short View of the English Stage*; and the clergy of the day hated him because he was a Roman Catholic.

463. *New Blackmores . . . arise.* Sir Richard Blackmore (1652-1729) was one of the Court physicians, and the author of the *Creation* and other poems. He was a capital physician but a poor poet. He attacked Dryden for his religious views, and the poet replied by putting him into the satirical pillory as the 'Quack Maurus' in the *Secular Masque*. *The Rev. Luke Millbourn* was a man of more ability as a critic, and his strictures upon Dryden will now be concurred in by all unbiassed readers.

465. *Zoilus*—a grammarian of Amphipolis, who annotated Homer, Plato, and Isocrates. His criticisms on Homer were so very incisive that he received the name, *Homeromastix*—the Lash of Homer.

483. *And such as Chaucer is, shall Dryden be.* The idea intended to be conveyed is that to posterity the lines of Dryden would appear as archaic as those of Chaucer. Pope, however, failed to take account of the law that in

Line

inverse ratio to the progress of a nation in culture and civilisation, its language becomes less susceptible to change.

494-508. The same ideas are expressed with less grace but more satiric force in Churchill's *Author*, ll. 4-50.

520. *Cf.* Young's *Satires*, No. 1, ll. 49-55.

536. *An Easy Monarch* = Charles II., whose amours were the scandal of his age. The next line, "seldom at council, never in a war," aptly described the man who was the secret pensioner of Louis XIV.

544. *A foreign reign* = the reign of the foreigner William III. This is an example of the rhetorical figure of Hypallage, by which the relations of things in a sentence are mutually interchanged, but without obscuring the sense.

545. *Socinus*. The name of two men, uncle and nephew, Laelius Socinus (1525-1562) and Faustus Socinus (1539-1604), who subjected all the doctrines of the Reformation to rationalistic examination, with the result that they rejected the Divinity of Christ, the doctrine of human depravity, etc.

552. *Titans*—a gigantic brood, the children of Uranus and Gaea (Heaven and Earth). According to Greek mythology they fought with Zeus (Jupiter) for sovereignty, but were defeated through the agency of Hercules.

585 *Appius* — John Dennis, who had written a tragedy *Appius and Virginia*. Dennis retorted upon Pope in a strain of ribald personalities.

617. *D'Urfey's Tales*. Thomas D'Urfey (1630-1723) was what may be termed a professional humorist. Plays, operas, poems, songs, flowed from his pen.

Line

His metrical tales, "Pills to Purge Melancholy," had a great popularity in their day.

619. *Samuel Garth*—M.D. (1670-1719), afterwards Sir Samuel, a physician and poet of the reign of Queen Anne. His chief work is *The Dispensary*, a satire on the claim of the apothecaries to prescribe as well as to compound medicines. There was a report current at the time that Garth did not write the poem himself, but paid an obscure poet to do so. Pope refers to this in the passage before us.

623. *St Paul's Churchyard* was the quarter where the booksellers had their booths, and the neighbourhood is still frequented by many of the leading establishments in the trade. St Paul's Church, before the Fire, was a noted rendezvous for the wits and authors. It is frequently mentioned by the Elizabethan dramatists.

645. Aristotle as we have seen (Cf. *ante* l. 138) was the first to write on many branches of science.

648. *The Maeonian Star* = Homer; either because he was the Sun of Maeon (hence he is often called Maeonides) or because he was born in Maeonia, Asia Minor.

653. *Horace*—Quintus Horatius Flaccus (B.C. 65—B.C. 8), who, besides his *Odes*, *Satires*, and *Epistles*, wrote the metrical treatise, *De Arte Poetica*, on which Pope's present poem is largely based.

665. *Dionysius*—(B.C. 50—B.C. 7), surnamed *Halicarnassus*, owing to his being born there, was a distinguished critic, rhetorician, and historian. His chief work was his *Archaeologia*, a history of Rome down to 264 B.C., written in Greek.

667. *Petronius*—a fashionable courtier of the reign of Nero,

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surnamed "Arbiter," from the epithet applied in all probability to him (for he was the only Caius Petronius to whom it could refer) of 'arbiter elegantiae.' He is generally credited with the authorship of the fragments *Petronii Arbitrii Satyricon*, in which the Emperor Nero is held up to ridicule.

669. *Quintilian*—(35-96 A.D.), a grammarian, rhetorician, and teacher of eloquence, of great eminence in Rome. His chief work was *De Institutione Oratoria Libri, XII.*, which is to this day valued.

675. *Longinus*—Dion Cassius (213-273 A.D.), a philosopher and rhetorician. He taught rhetoric at Athens, where Porphyry was his pupil, but later he settled at Palmyra, and became chief counsellor to Queen Zenobia, whom he encouraged to throw off the Roman yoke. For this he was beheaded by order of the Emperor Aurelian. His chief work is, *Concerning the Sublime* (*Peri Hypsous*).

675. *All the Nine inspire* = the Nine Muses. These were, Calliope (presiding over Eloquence and Epic Poetry), Melpomene (Tragedy), Euterpe (Music), Urania (Astronomy), Clio (History), Thalia (Pastoral and Comic Poetry), Terpsichore (Dancing), Erato (Lyric Poetry), Polyhymnia (Rhetoric).

686. The fall of Rome took place A.D. 476.

693 *Erasmus*—(1467-1536), one of the great scholars of the Reformation epoch. His *Greek Testament*, his *Adagia*, and his *Colloquia* are marvels of wide erudition and critical insight.

696. *Vandals*—a race of barbarians who originally came from the region between the Vistula and the Oder: they

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sacked Rome in 455, and showed such contempt for the precious works of art that their name has become a synonym for wanton destruction of remains of art.

697. *Leo's golden days.* This was Cardinal Giovanni de' Medici (1475-1521), son of Lorenzo the Magnificent. The pontificate of this scion of the great Florentine house, who took the name Leo X., lasted from 1513 to 1521, and was one of the most glorious in the entire annals of modern Italian literature and art. He was undoubtedly the greatest of the Humanist Popes.

704. *Raphael*—(1483-1520), generally regarded as one of the greatest painters the world has yet seen, who ~~united~~ beauty to majesty in his treatment of his art.

Vida—(1475-1566) wrote a work in imitation of Horace, and called it *De Arte Poetica.* He was an Italian poet of Leo's days, but wrote in Latin.

708. *Mantua*—the birthplace of Virgil.

714. *Boileau*—(1636-1711), a French poet and critic, who in his day was a sort of dictator in the poetic art. He also wrote on the *Art of Poetry*, and Pope translates many lines of it in this poem.

718. *Defied the Romans* — the Classical School, which influenced France so much.

724. From the Duke of Buckingham's *Essay on Poetry*, l. 2.

725. *Roscommon* — The Earl of (1634-1685), a poet of considerable merit, whose metrical *Essay on Translated Verse* also influenced Pope. Roscommon was amongst the first to welcome *Paradise Lost* as one of the greatest poems in the language.

729. *Walsh, William* (1663-1708), a scholar, critic and poet of some merit, who directed the early studies of Pope.

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